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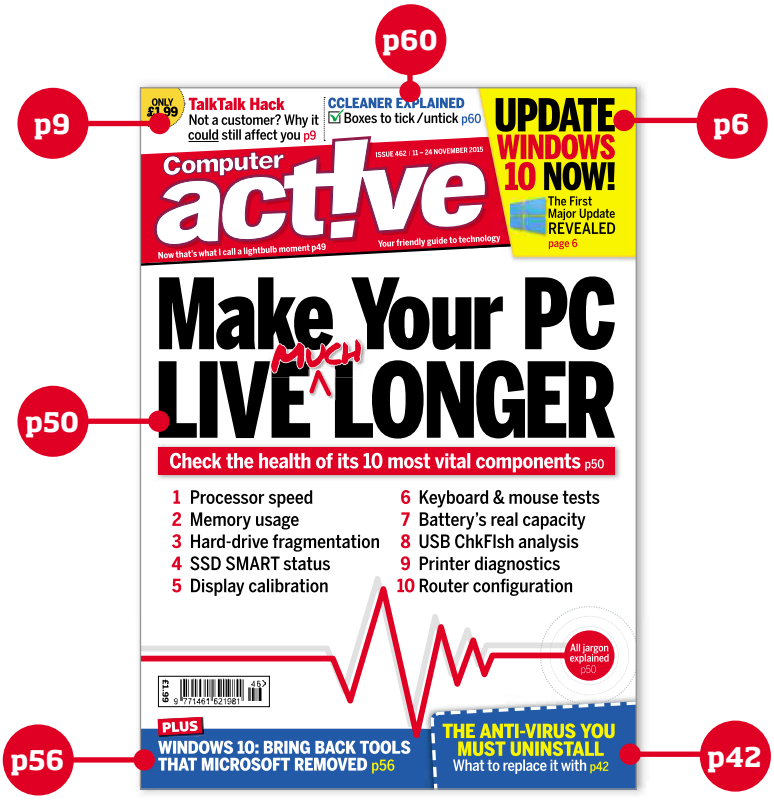
From the Editor

Jargon has a lot to answer for. It intimidates the average user into thinking they can never fully understand how their computers work. This doesn't bother tech 'experts' who rip you off charging a fortune to fix your PC. They're happy to be seen as the gatekeepers of all computing knowledge, possessing an obscure wisdom beyond the grasp of mere mortals.

But that's rubbish. To learn what makes your PC tick (not literally I hope), you simply need to run the right programs and use Windows' built-in tools. As we reveal in our Cover Feature, checking the health of your PC isn't rocket science. There are numerous tests you can perform to find out the speed of your processor, how much memory you use, and whether your hard drive is about to conk out.

I took these three tests on my home PC and discovered that my processor is reassuringly speedy and I had a surprising amount of memory left. But my poor hard drive is a goner. I'm asking Santa for a new PC this Christmas.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk



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900,000
Number of Android devices infected by Ghost Push – *p14*

10Gbps
Highest speed recorded by Li-Fi devices – *p49*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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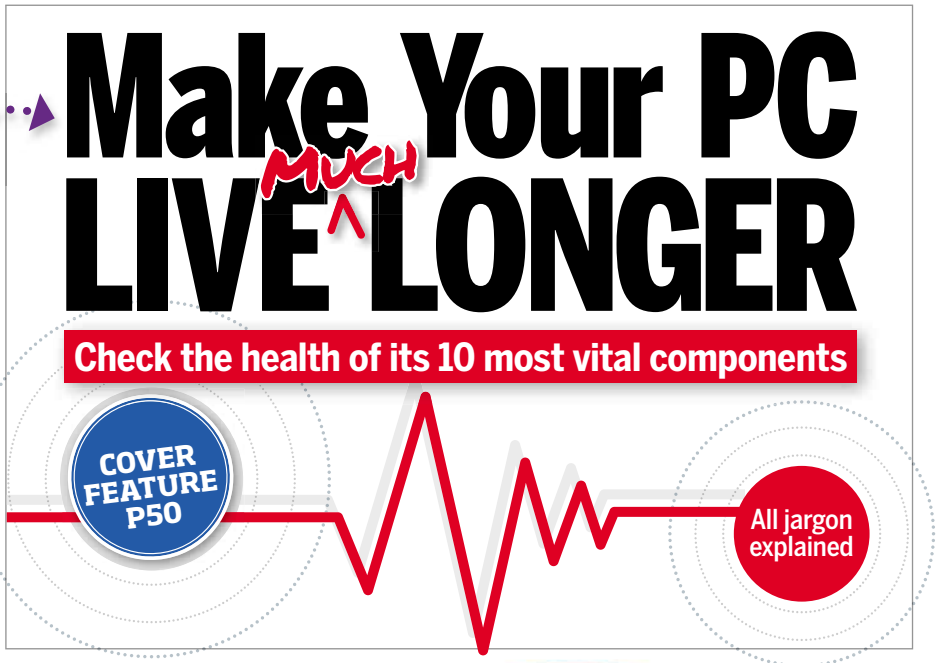

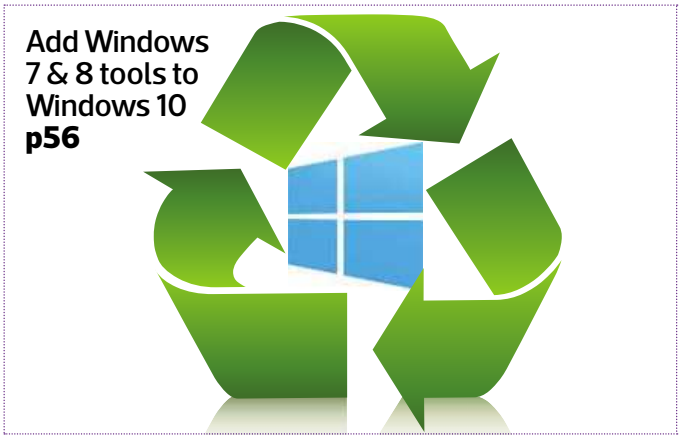

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The Definitive Guide To Windows 10

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News

The top stories in the world of technology

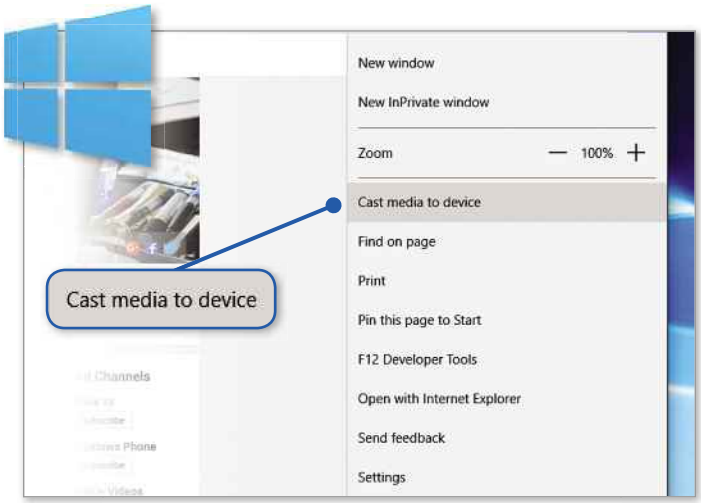
Windows 10: first update improves Start menu and Edge

Microsoft is set to release the first significant update to Windows 10. Codenamed 'Threshold 2', it is expected to arrive on PCs on 12 November, 10 days later than was first rumoured. It will be automatically downloaded on to PCs running the operating system.

The update is likely to contain new tools that many experts had thought would be in the operating system when it launched on 29 July.

These include the revamped Messaging app for the Desktop, which first appeared in Windows 8, but was removed in 2013 by Microsoft in its 8.1 update. The new app will make it easier for Windows 10 users to send messages to people while chatting to them on Skype.

Microsoft is also expected to add several tools to Cortana, including the option to send text messages from your Desktop to phones.



Most of the new tools have already appeared in Insider Preview versions of Windows 10. Two new tools first seen in the Preview Build 10547 are the ability to add an extra column to the Start menu and make Desktop tiles wider.

The update is also expected to add features to Edge, Microsoft's new browser. The most significant would be the option to show whatever is appearing in your browser on your TV, similar to the 'casting' technology in Google's Chromecast (see our review on page 22).

This feature was added in late October to the Preview Build 10576. In the blog post announcing it (www.snipca.com/18568), Microsoft explains how to use 'media casting' to send YouTube videos and Facebook photos from your PC to your TV (see screenshot).

However, Edge users expecting browser extensions will be disappointed. Microsoft had wanted to add these to Edge in the Threshold 2 update, but has decided to hold off until 2016 in order to make them safer and more reliable.

In a statement the company said that bringing extensions to Edge "continues to be a high priority". It's possible they may appear in the so-called 'Redstone' update, a major overhaul of the operating system expected next summer.

COMMENT

This update feels like a 'best of' compilation, featuring the most impressive tools in recent Preview Builds. None of them will transform Windows 10 overnight, but as a package of useful tweaks and features, this is as good an update as we could have expected. Windows 7 and 8 users who have been waiting for the right time to upgrade should now consider taking the plunge, though maybe after waiting a few days for any problems to be ironed out.

USE 7 OR 8? YOU *WILL* DOWNLOAD WINDOWS 10

Microsoft's policy of 'encouraging' people to upgrade to Windows 10 will get even more aggressive from early next year.

The company has already been criticised for automatically downloading Windows 10 files on to PCs whether owners had requested the free upgrade or not. But now, in a move that will anger many users, it has confirmed that Windows 10 is to be re-categorised as a 'recommended update' in its Windows Update system. This means anyone running 7 or 8 who has 'automatic updates' activated will have Windows 10 downloaded on to their PC.

You can only prevent this by turning off automatic updates, which leaves you at risk of missing out on Microsoft's security fixes. When Windows 10 has downloaded – but before it has installed on to your PC – you'll be asked whether you want to continue. At this point you can choose to stay with Windows 7 or 8.

Read more at www.snipca.com/18567. We'll cover this controversial move in more detail soon.

You'll like this...
The EU has said it will ban data-roaming charges (www.snipca.com/18528)

...but not this
Broadband prices have risen 40 per cent since 2011 (www.snipca.com/18529)

Now British Gas' customer details leaked online

British Gas has become the latest company forced to warn customers about a breach in data security.

In late October, it contacted customers to warn them that 2,200 account passwords and email addresses had been briefly posted online.

They appeared on the website Pastebin (http://pastebin.com), which is used to share chunks of text - often programming code.

But British Gas insisted that its security hadn't been breached by hackers, instead blaming an "internal technical problem".

The company said: "As you'd expect, we encrypt and store this information securely. From our investigations, we are confident that the information which appeared online did not come from British Gas".

It added that while no bank account or payment card details were revealed, passwords could have been used to access customers' names, addresses and old energy bills.

If the account details didn't come from British Gas, hackers may have pieced them together from previous data leaks, or used phishing emails to trick customers into revealing them.

British Gas removed the details from Pastebin as soon as it saw them, and disabled the affected accounts.

Details will be sent to the Information Commissioner's Office following the leak, British Gas said.

It became the third company in the space of a week to admit security breaches. Two days before, Marks & Spencer temporarily took down its website after admitting that a flaw allowed customers to see each other's details.

More seriously, TalkTalk confirmed that the bank account details of many of its customers could've been stolen in a hack (see page 9).

The leaks have highlighted the growing threat of data theft. Recent research from security company Symantec showed that criminals stole the identities of 609,000 people from British companies in the past year.

Experts say these profiles are sold on the 'Dark Web', often for as little as £20 each.

PM to EU: I'll make porn filters UK law

David Cameron has vowed to veto new EU laws that have ruled online porn filters illegal.

The new rules force internet service providers (ISPs) to treat online traffic 'without discrimination, restriction or interference'. These so-called 'net neutrality' laws mean that ISPs can't block porn websites by default.

Virgin, BT (pictured), TalkTalk and Sky introduced parental controls last year. They presented customers with a screen asking them whether they wanted access to adult-themed websites.

Their actions followed pressure from the Government, which wanted to protect children from seeing online porn. The Prime Minister said such content was "corroding childhood".

But the EU has now said that ISPs must treat all legal web traffic – which includes most porn sites – equally. They would still be allowed to block illegal content, such as sites offering pirated downloads of music and films.

However, David Cameron told the House of Commons that he had secured an opt-out to the EU ruling, allowing him at a later date to pass legislation to make porn filters UK law.

This would replace the existing voluntary agreement between the Government and ISPs.

Cameron said: "I think it is absolutely vitally important that we enable parents to have that protection for their children from this material on the internet".

He added: "When I read [the news in] my *Daily Mail* this morning, I spluttered over my cornflakes because we work so hard to put in place these filters".

Despite Mr Cameron's comments, some legal experts questioned whether the Government could supersede EU law in this way.

This is because ISPs might argue that having porn filters legally forced upon them is 'inconsistent' with the new ruling.

IN BRIEF

ONLINE DATING SCAMMERS STEAL £33M

Fraudsters used dating websites to con people out of £33m in the past 12 months. The figure comes from Action Fraud, which said 3,543 people reported such frauds during the period. Victims are often befriended by scammers, then asked for money to pay for things such as travel costs and medical bills. Action Fraud criticised dating sites for "very rarely" vetting the authenticity of their members.

REFUNDS FOR BROKEN WI-FI ON TRAINS

Train passengers will be refunded if the advertised Wi-Fi doesn't work on their journey, under plans to get "a better deal" for travellers. The Department of Transport has launched a consultation into the proposals, and expects them to be in place by next April. Wi-Fi is now offered on South West Trains, and the West Coast and East Coast main lines, with Northern and TransPennine services due to start providing it later this year.

Tomorrow's world

Wi-Fi could become Spy-Fi after pioneering work from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Experts in computer science and artificial intelligence have shown how wireless signals can be used to create a silhouette of a person standing behind a wall. The system can even use this image to identify people. Watch the MIT's RF-Capture technology being used at www.snipca.com/18506.

IN BRIEF

MINI WINDOWS 10 PC HOPS INTO VIEW

A Windows 10 PC small enough to fit into your pocket has been launched by the American company InFocus. Called the Kangaroo (www.kangaroo.cc), the mini PC plugs into almost any screen, connects to a mouse and keyboard using Bluetooth 4.0 and comes with 32GB of storage. It's on sale in the US priced $99 (around £64). InFocus hasn't said whether it plans to launch the Kangaroo in the UK.

ANYONE CAN READ YOUR FACEBOOK POSTS

Facebook has made every 'public' post searchable, which means they can now be read by any Facebook member. Previously, someone's search results were limited to posts made by their friends and on pages they had 'liked'. All past posts can also be searched for. The only way to prevent this is to change your privacy settings within Facebook: we'll explain how in our next issue.

Police told to work with tech companies to fight online fraud

UK police should work more closely with technology companies to fight the growing threat of online fraud, a report has said.

TechUK, an industry body that represents 850 technology companies, called for new measures to help the police investigate cybercrime. Its 'Partners Against Crime' report (PDF: www.snipca.com/18503) came days after new figures showed that online fraud makes up 44 per cent of overall crime in the UK.

One of the key failings according to TechUK is how police record cybercrime. The report claims that, when asked, 50 per cent of police forces were unable to provide exact reports for such offences without manually looking through their archive.

The report says that such outdated methods make it hard for the police to appreciate the true scale of online fraud.

TechUK makes eight recommendations on how the police and companies can improve the reporting and recording of cybercrime. These include closer cooperation between the police and technology companies – particularly security firms – so they can more quickly share information about threats.

James Murphy, Associate Director of Defence and Security at TechUK said: "The ability to effectively tackle cybercrime remains the collaborative responsibility of civil society as a whole, including businesses, consumers and the technology industry".

In addition, TechUK wants more pressure put on companies to flag up incidents of cybercrime, after an estimated 85 per cent of fraud and cybercrime during 2013-14 went unreported.

It also called for more funding to tackle cybercrime, better support for victims and training for police to understand the technical details involved in attacks.

The report will be welcomed by those who feel not enough is done to help ordinary victims of cybercrime. In October, *The Times* revealed that the police examine only one in a 100 cases of online fraud (see 'Question of the Fortnight', Issue 460).

Cold calls to mobile phones rocket

The number of nuisance calls to mobile phones are soaring, according to research by consumer group Which?

The results from a survey of more than 2,000 people show that 72 per cent of people received at least one unwanted call in a recent 30-day period. This compares with 55 per cent in 2013.

Which? also said that 10 per cent of people owning a mobile phone reported receiving as many as 20 unwanted calls during the month.

It encouraged people plagued by problem calls to add their mobile number to the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). Telemarketing companies aren't allowed to ring numbers on this list unless you have given consent.

Which? said that not enough people were aware that the TPS deals with mobile phone numbers, as well as landlines. Figures reveal that only 3 per cent of mobile-phone users in the UK have signed up to the TPS.

To raise awareness of the TPS' powers, Which? has worked with the service to launch a free text service that lets people register their numbers. Send a text stating OPTOUT to 80057 and you'll receive some instructions from Which?

More than 290,000 people have backed Which?'s 'Calling Time' campaign for tougher laws on spam calls and texts. Find out more at www.snipca.com/18502.

The world's gone mad!

You may think you'll always be able to avoid Facebook at funerals, but even these solemn occasions could soon be invaded by the dubious delights of social media. Gloucester-based company Perfect Choice Funeral Plans has designed the "coffin of the future", which has a screen showing tributes to the deceased taken from Facebook and Twitter (here's visual proof: www.snipca.com/18472). Thankfully, it's only a concept – for now, at least.

Question of the Fortnight

TalkTalk hack: are ex-customers also at risk?

The huge hack may end up affecting more than the company's existing subscribers

When TalkTalk announced in October that hackers may have stolen the personal details of millions of customers, it was thought that only those on a current contract were affected. But it has since emerged that millions of former customers may also be at risk.

The company admitted that it couldn't "rule out" the possibility that previous customers' details were part of the theft. This would increase the number of potential victims from four million (TalkTalk's current customer base).

It's unknown how many people left TalkTalk in any given period, but it's estimated that between 16 and 25 per cent of broadband customers switch provider every year.

This figure may be higher for TalkTalk because significant numbers of customers are likely to have already switched following two incidences earlier this year that saw the company's data breached.

Referring to the latest hack, a spokeswoman for TalkTalk told the *Daily Telegraph*: "There is a risk and a chance that some previous customers' details were stored on the website".

She also admitted that TalkTalk hasn't been able to contact past customers to warn them that their details may have been stolen.

"It's easy for us to pull our existing customers' details and email them," she said. "But it's not so easy for us to do that for former customers."

> "TalkTalk says that former customers may have had their details stolen"

This means many former customers won't know that criminals may now be rifling through their personal details.

TalkTalk's inability to contact ex-subscribers has angered many of them. Speaking to the *Telegraph*, former TalkTalk customer John Carter said that those who have cancelled should be treated "exactly the same" as existing subscribers.

Mr Carter, from Warwickshire, cancelled his TalkTalk account in August after his details were stolen in a hack, which resulted in him receiving scam calls from China and India. At the time the company told him that it didn't delete old customers' details from their system.

He added: "I have not received an email – or any correspondence at all – telling me I was at further risk".

Computeractive readers are also annoyed. Jason Bowyer wrote on our Facebook page: "I thought I was lucky as I switched to another provider the day before the hack. A company of that size should have top-end security. No excuse in my opinion".

THE FACTS

- TalkTalk admits that former customers may have had their details stolen
- The ISP says that up to four million current customers may have been affected
- The company will let customers leave without a fee only if they lost money as a result of the hack

Whether you're an existing or former customer of TalkTalk, it may prove tricky to get compensation or cancel your contract without incurring an early-termination fee. The company says it will consider waiving this fee only if customers can show that the hack led to money being stolen from their account.

To help prove this, customers (past and present) should contact Action Fraud to get a Crime Reference Number. You'll then need to write to TalkTalk's legal department, the address for which is in MoneySavingExpert's excellent guide to your rights: www.snipca.com/18525.

If TalkTalk's policies are seen as too restrictive, regulators may step in. Ofcom has the power to take legal action against the company for imposing an early-termination fee, but says it's "too early to say" whether this will happen. It's possible that Ofcom will pass the buck to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which can fine companies if they are found to have misused people's data.

The fallout of this hack could drag on for months, but one thing already seems clear: TalkTalk's reputation has been damaged, perhaps irrecoverably. It will take another hammering if former customers say they've had money stolen from their accounts.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
Email: letters@computeractive.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/computeractive
Twitter: @ComputerActive
www.twitter.com/computeractive

Treating porn addiction 'trivialises' others

The big problem with treating any kind of internet addiction on the NHS is that it trivialises other addictions that are far more serious. I'm a volunteer for a charity that helps people overcome drink and drug dependency. I've seen lives ruined by these twin evils. I have no doubt that categorising them as illnesses is medically appropriate. Victims of these addictions feel completely helpless to control their behaviour.

I find it hard to apply the same logic to people who watch too much porn online, or who go bankrupt spending too much money while internet shopping. We should consider some types of behaviour, such as these, to be within the realms of self-control. It's different to drink and drugs, which chemically alter the brain to prolong the dependency.

Michael Taylor

BBC pioneers in technology

I was completely baffled by Jonathan Buckland's letter in Issue 460 ('BBC should abandon the micro:bit computer'). If he bothers to read the BBC's remit he will see that it is to "entertain, inform and educate". I would have thought that there was nothing more educational than giving young children a good start in computing.

Regarding the required technical expertise, may I remind Mr Buckland that the BBC has been at the forefront in research and development since the 1920s. It has been one of the front-runners in radio, television and satellite broadcast (which Margaret Thatcher 'gifted' to Murdoch), not forgetting electronic music, creating among other things, the *Doctor Who* theme written in 1963 by the Radiophonic Workshop (see photo below).

Over the years, when it comes to innovation, the UK has led the world, only to give it away, usually to the United States. We invented the jet engine, the vertical take-off plane, the hovercraft, not to mention the computer *and* the internet. If the BBC computers help to give our kids a leg up in the world of computing, that's fantastic.

Edward Joint

300Mbps from BT? Not in rural Somerset

I have no doubt that BT will deliver 300Mbps to 10 million homes by 2020 (See News, Issue 460). But (and there always seems to be a "but") only if these homes are in urban areas.

I spend my time in two locations: the West Midlands, where I enjoy a fast cable connection (not BT) that greatly assists my consultancy practice; and in a village in west Somerset where the pace of life is somewhat slower. In the latter location, which is by no means isolated, I enjoy the benefits of BT's so-called broadband via my phone line. It's so slow and variable that it reminds me of when I was sweating over a cranky chirping modem, 30-odd years ago.

BT has told me it is "not contemplating installing a cable service in [my] area in the foreseeable future". Now I'm not a

mathematician, but in my book "foreseeable future" equates to five years.

So like thousands of fellow rural sufferers I will persist in trying to connect to the outside world after 2020 with a service that is outdated, slow and likely to provide lots of anxious moments. In the meantime, I will continue to read with wonder about downloading a 25MB file in less time than it takes to make a cup of coffee. Meanwhile, my wife and dog will still have to hide in the bedroom and cover their ears whenever I announce: "I am going to try and connect my laptop/iPad to the internet".

Peter Weiss

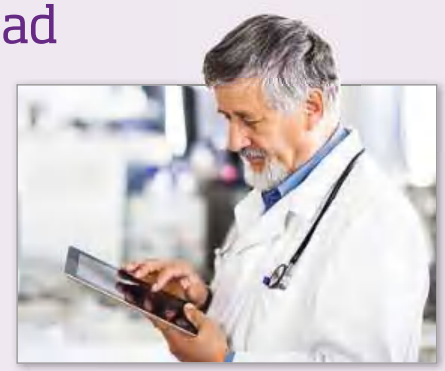
Microsoft 'will charge annual fee' for Windows 10

Microsoft is better known for its aggressive marketing style than its altruism, so does its offer to upgrade previous versions of Windows to

Doctors should use tech to cut their workload

The debate that's been raging in *Computeractive* recently about doctors using technology to contact patients has totally missed the point. On the one hand, we have people saying that doctors should work harder to 'embrace' tech; on the other, we have people saying doctors already work too many hours.

This split in opinion is a false one. The truth is: the reason doctors should be encouraged to use more technology is in order to *reduce* their workload. An email to a worried patient is a more efficient way of 'treating' them than seeing them in person for 20 minutes, only to find out they've got a slight



cold. I wonder, deep down, whether many GPs just fear change because it requires learning new computing skills? But these are the same skills we all have to learn in the private sector to carry out our jobs.

Allan McLeish

Windows 10 for free signal a change of heart? If only.

It seems to me more likely that once Windows 10 has achieved a large enough customer base and the 'free' period has ended, it will change Windows 10 into a subscription program and charge users an annual fee. Either way, I'll stick with Windows 7 and watch events. Beware Microsoft bearing gifts.

John Revell

Delighted with Windows 10

I've been using Windows 10 since its launch on both my laptop and PC and – all in all – I'm delighted with it. The two big plus points for me are that it fires up infinitely more quickly than Windows 7, and it is very stable. I have been amused at some of the negative comments which, by and large, relate to the peripherals. I especially could not understand all the fuss about the rather poor Microsoft Solitaire game because my wife spends 90 per cent of her time at the PC playing Patience, for which she has dozens of free choices from 123 Free Solitaire at www.treecardgames.com.

Cortana is of no interest to me and the Edge browser is nowhere near ready, so my default browser is Firefox, but for speed and some good add-ons I also use Maxthon Cloud (www.maxthon.com). Another weak aspect of Windows 10 is the poor Mail program which has so far proved incapable of "syncing" one of my email providers. My simple solution is to stick with the far superior Windows Live Mail 2012.

Paul Vivash

Hands off Microsoft, you *don't* own my PC

I see that Microsoft is trying to trick us into installing Windows 10 by putting it in the optional Windows updates (see 'Question of the Fortnight', Issue 459). I found it when my PC asked me to update and restart and I checked what updates were pending. All the important updates were unticked, but one of the optional updates was – guess which one – yes, the upgrade to Windows 10. Presumably if you weren't paying attention when the update was being processed and simply clicked when prompted, as many probably do, you would end up installing Windows 10 even though you'd not done any preparation, such as backing up all your important files. This is unacceptable.

First, they install a huge folder with installation files for when – not *if* – you upgrade. And now they try to trick you into upgrading by sneaking it into the monthly updates, even though you haven't reserved a copy of it. I'm beginning to wonder who actually owns the computer that *I* paid for – me or Microsoft.

I think I am going to turn automatic updates off and then check myself to see which updates are waiting to be installed. I'm beginning to wonder what poses the greatest risk: the security problems the updates correct or the updates themselves?

David Sprawson

STAR LETTER

Should the NHS treat porn addiction? One-word answer: no

I've had a deteriorating hip for the past 10 years or so, and finally decided to get something done about it this year. I thought the NHS would do the job without any fuss, but I've had my operation cancelled twice, and both times I was treated as though my views didn't matter. I now know where I was going wrong. I should have told them that I was 'suffering' from internet porn addiction. I'd have probably been seen straight away, given a luxury bed, and perhaps some 'literature' to help me cope with my condition.

Question of the Fortnight
Should the NHS treat online porn addiction?
NHS

My anger stems from reading your 'Question of the Fortnight' in Issue 461 ('Should the NHS treat online porn addiction?'). I was stunned to learn that porn addiction is even considered a problem, let alone something the NHS wastes money on. I'm truly sorry if somebody thinks that the limitless availability of online porn has ruined their life, but we've all got our temptations to resist.

Personally, I like watching videos of my football team Plymouth Argyle on YouTube. I've been known to get so engrossed in them that I've stayed up way beyond midnight, much to the annoyance of my wife who I wake up when I eventually go to bed. If I don't watch a video at least once a day, I get withdrawal symptoms. But am I addicted, or just an enthusiast? And if I am addicted, is that anyone's fault but my own?

As you rightly pointed out in your article, the NHS isn't awash with money. Financially, tough choices need to be made every day. But this *isn't* a tough choice. Deciding who should get life-prolonging cancer drugs – now that's a morally difficult dilemma. But frittering away money on people who have no self-control? Give me a break. I could have saved you 600-odd words and answered your question with just one: 'no'.

Jeff Cotton

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

End IE support to boost Edge

Microsoft should just bite the bullet and end all support for Internet Explorer (IE). I've come to that conclusion after reading in News (Issue 461) about the latest security fix for the browser.

It seems odd to me that Microsoft is wasting time fixing a browser it wants people to stop using. Surely this sends out the wrong message? The most effective way to get people to switch from anything is to warn them that continuing to use it compromises their safety. Abandon IE and millions will switch to Edge, I guarantee it. I'll stick with Firefox though!

William Oldham

Consumeractive

Can I get my delivery costs back?

Q **I needed a replacement part for my petrol strimmer and found an online company called Einhell (www.einhell-uk.co.uk) that sold what I needed. I ordered this for around £15, plus £3.50 postage. However, I was sent the wrong part. I want a full refund, but Einhell is refusing to refund the postage cost. Can this be right?**

John Hilbourne

A No, it's not right. Because he was sent the wrong part John is entitled to a full refund, including delivery costs, under the Consumer Contract Regulations. After John failed to persuade Einhell, we had a go, explaining that legally it must refund the delivery. But we got the same response from the company. It wouldn't budge. Einhell must also pay for the cost John incurs when he returns the strimmer.

We explained to John that we'd hit a brick wall and that the company refuses to discuss his order with us, which it's perfectly entitled to do. We've suggested he writes to Einhell once more explaining the law, and that if it doesn't comply he will report the company to Trading Standards by contacting Citizens Advice via its website: www.snipca.com/18306. Hopefully that should do the trick.

CASE CLOSED

Can you help us with a broadband service 'missold' by Plusnet?

Q **My mother was using BT's Infinity broadband service with speeds of up to 16Mbps. She switched to Plusnet after the company rang her to say it could offer the same type of deal but cheaper. But her broadband speeds are now much slower, and we've since found out that this is because Plusnet's broadband comes via an ADSL line, not the much faster fibre. Plusnet says she can upgrade, but that would be more expensive. And if she wants to leave she'll have to pay a hefty penalty because she's locked into a three-year deal. Can you help?**

Darren Gilbey

A We need more information from Darren to fully investigate his case, but we can offer advice that applies to all broadband contracts.

New rules introduced by Ofcom in June state that the terms and conditions in broadband contracts must be 'clear and fair', and must not contain hidden costs. But this doesn't mean he can simply cancel the contract without paying an early-termination fee. To legally avoid paying this, he has to prove there's a significant problem with the service, such as slower speeds than you were told you'd get.

Darren claims that Plusnet failed to point out that its broadband would be provided over a slower ADSL line. Instead, he says his mother was willfully misled by the salesperson. If Darren can prove this, he has a case for cancelling without incurring a fee.

Darren's mother should now contact Plusnet saying she believes she was missold the contract. They should ask the ISP for a 'deadlock' letter (using this template from consumer group Which?: www.snipca.com/18298) outlining how it intends to rectify the situation.

If Plusnet fails to come up with a satisfactory offer, she should take her complaint to CISAS (www.cisas.org.uk), the ombudsman that covers the phone and broadband industry. CISAS can be contacted by email (**info@cisas.org.uk**) and on 0207 520 3827.

She could also contact Ofcom because the regulator is keen to hear about companies mis-selling contracts. Learn more on Ofcom's site at www.snipca.com/18305.

CASE CLOSED

How come HP says my printer cartridge isn't UK-compatible?

Q **I have more than one HP printer using the HP78 tri-colour and associated HP45 black ink cartridge system, so I keep a spare of each handy. I've now found one of the spares isn't working. I contacted HP to complain, but got an email explaining the cartridges were intended for the African market and not the UK, so it won't replace it. However, I bought these cartridges in the UK. Is HP at fault here?**

John Perry

A It's possible HP has mistaken this cartridge for one meant to be sold in another part of the world. It's hard for us to check because we haven't got the cartridges' serial numbers. However, as a goodwill gesture, HP has sent John two cartridges for free, an outcome he's happy with.

Goods intended to be sold elsewhere which end up on the UK market are known as 'grey imports' or 'parallel imports'. It isn't illegal for a UK retailer to sell them, but they can cause problems. For example, leads may have the wrong connections, or spares may be incompatible with your particular product, despite having the same serial number.

Another problem is that the warranties and special offers covering such items aren't valid. But if the retailer is based in the UK, you're still protected by UK law because your contract is with them, not the manufacturer.

CASE CLOSED

We stand up for your legal rights

Contact us so we can investigate your case
Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

Can I get Apple to reinstate a feature missing in iOS 8?

Q After upgrading my iPad 3 to iOS 8, I discovered that Apple has removed a useful feature that lets people mirror their iPad screen on a large-screen TV using the AirPlay feature. Is there anything I can do to persuade Apple to reinstate the feature?

Terry Peters

A Legally, there's nothing Terry or others can do if upgrades to iOS, Android and Windows no longer contain much-loved features. Apple, Google and Microsoft remove these because they're seen as out of date or unpopular, though the emails we get from readers would suggest otherwise.

However, Terry is mistaken about the screen-mirroring option being absent from iOS 8, though he's not alone. In October last year, an iPad user called Twigwonderkid asked on the Apple forums (https://discussions.apple.com) where it had gone. Answering his query, other users said that it still existed, but that you have to connect to the AirPlay server first. Read the thread at www.snipca.com/18304, scrolling down to Alfred DeRose's reply for the solution to the problem. Apple explains how AirPlay works at www.snipca.com/18307 (see screenshot).

But technology companies do often remove features that are still popular with users. When this happens, there's nothing stopping disgruntled customers expressing their disappointment in the official forums and in emails to the company. Giant technology companies can appear aloof, but there is evidence that people power works. For example, Microsoft buckled to public pressure by bringing back a version of the Start menu in Windows 8.1 after its absence in Windows 8 was widely lamented.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATES

Success! Amazon performs u-turn and re-opens customer's account

There's been a surprising twist in the story of Hugh Miller's ongoing battle with Amazon. We last mentioned Hugh's case in Issue 460 to report that Amazon had closed his account because it claimed he had made an "extraordinary" number of requests for refunds, which Hugh denies.

Hugh took his complaint to the very top, emailing Amazon boss and founder Jeff Bezos (jeff@amazon.com) to ask him to investigate. It worked, because within days Emma from the 'buyer account escalations team' emailed Hugh to say his account had been re-opened, and apologised for any inconvenience.

Emma wrote: "I closely examined your account, your order history, and your related accounts to ensure that any decision regarding your account was made according to our policies. Having thoroughly reviewed your account and considered all of the information that you provided, I have re-opened your Amazon account".

Hugh was delighted, if surprised, calling Amazon's decision "unbelievable". He said: "It just goes to show, it's possible to take on one of the largest companies on Earth and win".

Hugh's masterstroke was emailing Jeff Bezos. The Amazon boss is famous for forwarding emails from unhappy customers to members of staff with just a question mark in the body of the email (read more at www.snipca.com/18309). If someone at Amazon receives such an email, they know that their boss wants the matter dealt with quickly. We think Hugh's complaint received this question-mark treatment.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

End-of-support dates for software and hardware

Adobe Acrobat and Reader
www.snipca.com/18310

Google
Chromebooks and Nexus tablets
www.snipca.com/18286

Internet Explorer
www.snipca.com/18289

Office 2013
www.snipca.com/18290

Office 2016
www.snipca.com/18293

Ubuntu
www.snipca.com/18296

Windows
www.snipca.com/18283
- **Windows Vista**
Extended support
11 April 2017
- **Windows 7**
Extended support
14 January 2020
- **Windows 8**
Mainstream support
9 January 2018
Extended support
10 January 2023
- **Windows 10**
Mainstream support
13 October 2020
Extended support
14 October 2025

Windows Phone
www.snipca.com/18295

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

'Ghost Push' Trojan in Android apps

What happened?

The number of Android devices infected by the vicious Ghost Push Trojan hit 900,000 after it spread through apps on the Google Play Store.

As a rule, apps on Google's official store are safe because they are vetted for malware before being allowed on. But Ghost Push has penetrated Google's defences to such an extent that phones and tablets in 116 countries have been infected.

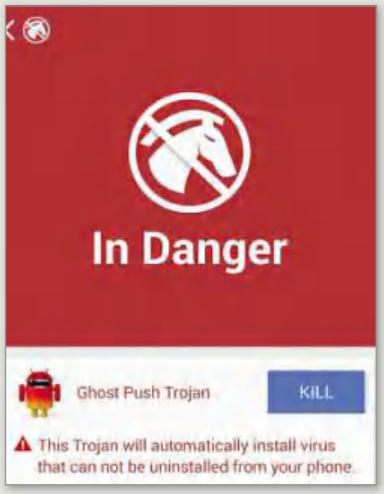
Discovered in September by security experts at Cheetah Mobile, Ghost Push obtains root control of the devices it infects, making it almost impossible to remove. The Chinese hackers operating the malware can force the device to open adverts and send text messages to expensive phone numbers, making them around $4m a day, according to Cheetah.

Some of the malicious apps include fake versions of Calculator, Smart Touch, Assistive Touch, Talking Tom 3, and Easy Locker.

What should you do?

It depends whether you've been infected. You can find out using Cheetah's highly rated Ghost Push Trojan Killer app (install from the Play Store: www.snipca.com/18326). It scans your device and lets you 'kill' the malware if it finds it (see screenshot).

If you've avoided infection, you don't need to worry – at least, for now – because Google has removed all the malicious apps. But so effective was this attack that we predict its perpetrators will be back. You certainly shouldn't stop using the Google Play Store – it's by far the safest market place for Android apps.



But be aware that no online store is beyond the reach of hackers, and you should research the legitimacy of any app online before installing it.

New tools

Malwarebytes Anti-Malware 2.2.0
www.malwarebytes.org

On page 42 we explain how to switch from AVG's free antivirus software to Avast's, following the former's decision to sell users' browsing history to advertisers. We strongly advise trying Avast, but if for some reason you don't like it, another excellent alternative is Malwarebytes.

That doesn't mean our advice on the best antivirus has changed: we recommend you buy one of Kaspersky's products (see our Reader Offer on page 68). But if you'd rather stick to free programs, it's a good time to try Malwarebytes. The new version is compatible with Windows 10 and has been tweaked to produce fewer false-positive results.

To download the program, visit the official site, click the 'For Home' tab at the top right, then click 'Malwarebytes Anti-Malware' (see screenshot). On the next page click the green button that says 'Get My Free Download'. But before you do, scroll down to compare it with the paid-for version (from £19.95 a year) to make sure it contains all the tools you want.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Yet another TalkTalk scam

I want to alert readers of a phone scam aimed at TalkTalk customers. You are told your router is causing security problems. They ask you to visit a website, from where they can remotely use your PC. They then say you're due a £200 refund, and take you to what appears to be your online bank, where it seems they have refunded £5,000 to your account. By way of apologising for this mistake, they promise you a further £100, by asking you to refund them only £4,700. You are told to post the money in cash to an address in China.

A F Strachan

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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VIRTUALISATION TOOL

VirtualBox 5.0.8

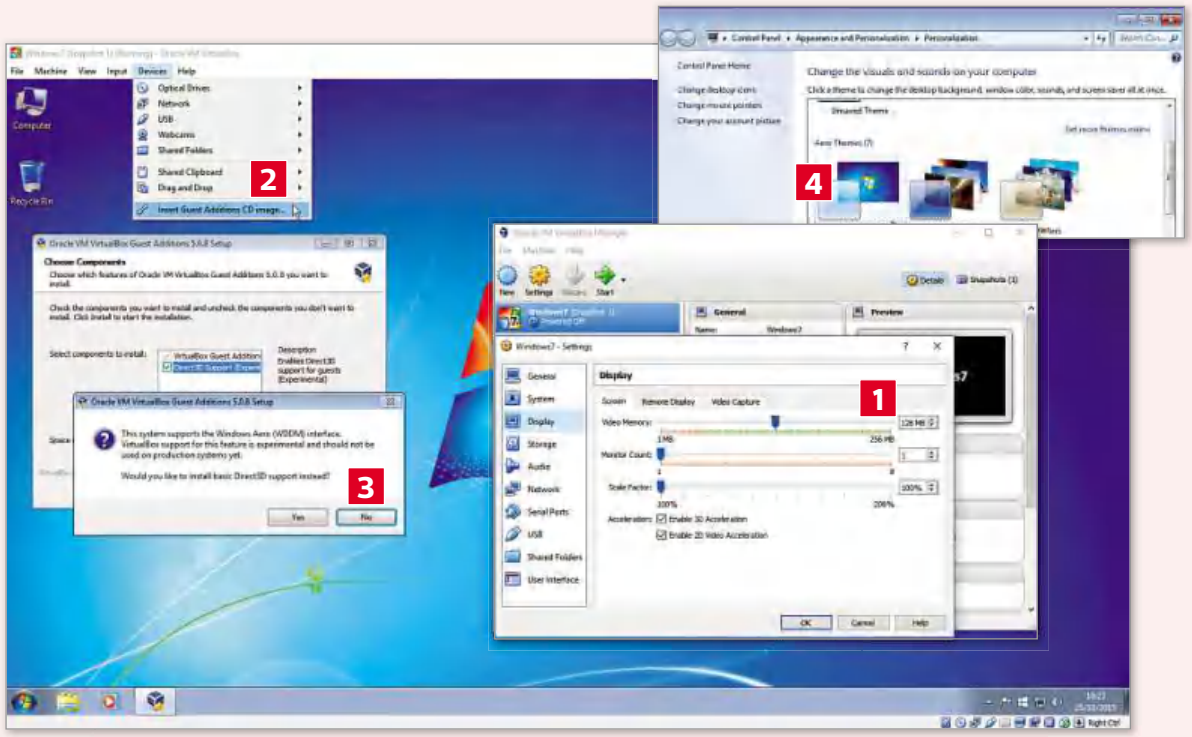
www.snipca.com/18451
What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

VirtualBox is an application for creating, running and managing virtual computers, letting you try an operating system before you commit to installing it for real. You can keep an old OS – like XP – going so you can run older programs. Want a walled-off area to test out new programs safely? With VirtualBox, all of this and more is possible.

The new version includes a number of significant fixes, features and improvements, including better support for 3D graphics, as well as smoother video and audio playback in a number of media players (such as VLC). Download and run the Windows Installer file from the link above. There are no hidden extras in the installer, so just follow the instructions.

If you already have a version of VirtualBox installed you may see a 'Failed to create extraction path' error message. Fixing this is easy. Open File Explorer and navigate to **C:\Users\YourUserName\AppData\Local\Temp**. Locate the file called VirtualBox and rename it VirtualBox_OLD. Run the installer again.

When you first start VirtualBox 5.0.8 you'll be prompted to also install the latest VirtualBox Extension Pack – it's worth doing so, because some of the tool's features won't work properly without it. Also see Secret Tips, Issue 446.

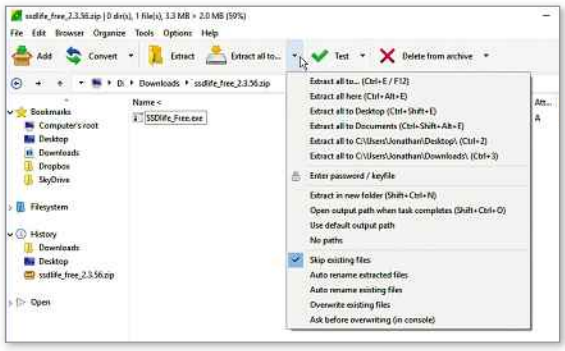


1 With your virtual PC switched off, right-click it and select Settings, then Display. Make sure there's at least 128MB of Video Memory. Tick the Enable 3D Acceleration box.

2 Click OK, then start your virtual PC. Click Devices, then 'Insert Guest Additions CD image'. In the setup Window, click Next twice, then tick the Direct3D Support option.

3 When prompted to install basic Direct3D support, click No, then OK, then click Install. When installation is finished, leave 'Reboot now' selected and click Finish.

4 Once your virtual PC has restarted, right-click an empty space on its desktop and select Personalize. In the window that opens, click 'Windows 7' under Aero Themes.



FILE COMPRESSOR

PeaZip 5.8.1

www.peazip.org

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

These days, Windows has a built-in ability to create or extract Zip files, but it's very basic. A better alternative is PeaZip, which squashes files and folders down to a manageable size using a range of compression techniques. What's more, it can open compressed file types that Windows can't – RAR, 7Z, TAR – and even experimental new formats, such as PAQ and LPAQ. You can also use it to encrypt sensitive files, convert from one archive format to another, browse ISO disc images, batch-rename or securely delete files and more. The latest version even lets you browse Linux EXT2, EXT3 and EXT4 disk images. There's no adware to watch out for when installing but, if you prefer, a portable version of the tool is available from www.snipca.com/18467.

TYPING TOOL

RapidTyping

www.snipca.com/18450

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

If you've ever felt that your typing skills (or lack thereof) have been holding you back from computing greatness, then RapidTyping could be the answer. It's a very simple tool designed to increase the speed and accuracy of your typing. You can follow training lessons, play games that help improve your typing and generate progress reports. RapidTyping's colourful, friendly approach makes it ideal for kids and adults alike. Installing RapidTyping won't add any unwanted junk on your PC, but just to be on the safe side you could instead use the portable version (www.snipca.com/18468), which you can run from a USB stick.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

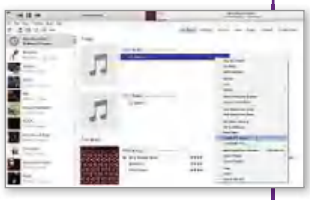
We tell you what software to use

What can I use to convert music for the car?

Q I want to be able to convert WAV music files on my PC into MP3 files to play via a USB stick in my car. Is there a simple, free way to do this?

Hann Redwin

A Annoyingly, the answer isn't quite as straightforward as you might imagine. There's certainly no shortage of media file-conversion tools available, but a lot of these cost money or install adware. Part of the problem is that the code needed to create MP3 format files isn't free. However, there are a few ways around this. If you don't need to edit the WAV files in any way and you just want to turn them into MP3s, then you could use iTunes (www.snipca.com/18469). Apple's media player isn't our favourite program, but it does have an easy (and free) MP3 converter built in. Right-click your WAV file and select 'Open with', then iTunes. The file will start playing – click pause, then right-click the file in iTunes and select Create MP3 Version. When it's done, right-click the MP3 file and select Get Info to add song, artist and album information.



If you need to edit your WAV files before converting them – split one long WAV into individual tracks, for example – or if you'd prefer not to install iTunes, then you can use Audacity (http://audacityteam.org) instead. Due to licensing restrictions, however, Audacity doesn't come with MP3 support built in – you'll need to download a separate plug-in from www.snipca.com/18470. Click the link labelled 'Lame_v3.99.3_for_Windows.exe'. Full instructions on how to add MP3 support to Audacity can be found at www.snipca.com/18471.

Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 9.7

South Korea's answer to the iPad Air 2

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Poor old Samsung. When it isn't in court losing lawsuits to Apple over 'copying' iPhones and iPads, it's winning them for the wrong reasons. Back in 2012, a British judge ruled that its Galaxy Tab wouldn't be mistaken for Apple's tablet – not because it wasn't virtually identical, but because it was 'not as cool'.

It's one thing to hear that from kids on the internet, something else when it's a bloke in a wig whose pronouncements can be cited by lawyers for years to come. At least he didn't add a 'crying with laughter' emoji.

Perhaps stung by this, Samsung went on to launch the Galaxy Tab S 10.5, which was bigger than the iPad and had a widescreen display. That model is now being sold for £349 (www.snipca.com/18325), which is a bargain for a big tablet with a high-quality screen, even one that struggles with complex web pages and 3D games.

But once again the temptation to go head to head with Apple has proved irresistible. In Issue 461, we tested the Galaxy Tab S2 8.0, Samsung's new rival to the iPad mini 4. The larger S2 9.7 matches the shape and size of the iPad Air 2, which hasn't been updated since it was launched a year ago. So there's a golden opportunity to improve on Apple. But has Samsung pulled it off?

The S2 comes in gold, black or white. It's slightly thinner and lighter than the iPad Air 2, yet feels reasonably sturdy, even though it's not quite as stiff as Apple's aluminium unibody. Like the iPad's, the Home button contains a fingerprint sensor, but there's no chip built in for electronic payments.

The 9.7in screen has the same high resolution as Apple's (2048x1536 pixels), and looks great, although on close inspection colours have a slight yellowish tint that the iPad doesn't suffer from. The 8-megapixel camera on the back sits in the middle at the top, away from stray fingers, and takes good photos and videos as long as there's plenty of light.

Samsung hasn't tried to match the iPad Air 2's high performance; the S2 9.7 averages out similarly to the slightly smaller HTC/Google Nexus 9, but lacks both rivals' ability to cope with demanding 3D games. Android 5 (Lollipop) runs smoothly, though, and a multi-tasking option has been added to let you use certain apps alongside others, much like in Apple's iOS 9.

Like other tablets, the Galaxy Tab S2 9.7 is also available in a more expensive version that can connect to the internet over a 3G/4G mobile network as well as Wi-Fi. This costs £50 more, but also requires a SIM card with a network tariff. Pay-as-you-go deals are available, or you can spread the cost of the tablet by taking out a monthly contract. For example, you can get the Galaxy Tab 9.7 for just £29 if you sign up with Three for two years (www.snipca.com/18320).

That gives you up to 15GB of data for a fixed monthly payment of £39. At a minimum of £965 in total, it's by no means a cheap option. Unless you really need the ultimate convenience of being able to get online when there's no Wi-Fi, you'll save a lot by avoiding contracts.

The S2 9.7 comes with twice the storage of the similarly priced iPad Air 2, at 32GB, and can also take a microSD card to expand this. Overall, it's not as impressive as either the iPad Air 2 or Sony's Xperia Z4 (£500 from www.snipca.com/18330), nor as cheap as the Nexus 9, which you can find discounted to under £300. But it's a very good Android tablet.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.9GHz Samsung Exynos 5433 eight-core processor • 32GB flash storage • 9.7in 2048x1536-pixel screen • 8-megapixel rear camera • 2.1-megapixel webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • Android 5.0.2 • 237x169x5.6mm (HxWxD) • 389g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/18324

VERDICT: Apple's combination of software and hardware remains unbeatable, but if you want an Android tablet, this is a decent buy

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: iPad Air 2 £399 Although the price is similar, this only gets you 16GB of storage. It's worth paying the extra £80 for 64GB

PHONE | **£429** from Sony www.snipca.com/18339

Sony Xperia Z5 Compact

Small can still be beautiful

Remember when mobile phones were hilariously enormous? As technology improved, they scaled down to the size of a landline phone. Then they kept going, becoming small enough to slip in a shirt pocket. When the iPhone arrived, it made a virtue of being just as small and slim. But unlike other phones, the iPhone consisted almost entirely of a screen. And if we'd learned anything from the history of TVs, it was that a bigger screen is better.

So when the iPad came out and proved a large display could still be portable, the writing was on the wall for phones. Samsung's Galaxy Note, with its 5.3in display, seemed huge compared to the 3.5in iPhone, but was popular. Other makers followed suit, and the 'phablet' was born. Even Apple couldn't resist the trend, and today its two current models are 4.7in and 5.5in. Its last 3.5in phone, the 4s, was discontinued last year.

Sony's Xperia Z5 Compact may not be *that* small, but it bucks the trend with a slightly narrower screen than the current 4.7in iPhones. Its squared-off case is noticeably smaller and lighter, though not as slim. The back is glass, like the iPhone 4 and 5, with a frosted finish that resists fingerprints but seems likely to pick up scratches. It comes in yellow or 'coral', an almost-red pink, as well as black or white. A fingerprint sensor is built into the power button on the right edge, rather than the Home button on the front, which feels much more natural.

The screen is almost as sharp as Apple's Retina displays, and covers almost the whole sRGB colour range with good contrast. It doesn't go as bright as an iPhone, but it's still one of our favourite phone displays. Android apps not only look good but work smoothly thanks to a fast eight-core processor and 2GB of memory. Apple's latest processors still edge it, but it's better than other Android phones at this price. The latest 3D games run perfectly, and owners of Sony's PS4 console can use the Z5 Compact as a portable screen.

Sony's new 23-megapixel camera has a lot more dots than any of Apple's, beating even the 12 megapixels of the iPhone 6s. That doesn't mean it takes better pictures, and if you look closely the Z5 Compact's pictures are grainier, meaning some of the extra resolution is just extra noise. But there's still plenty of detail, and exposure and colour balance look natural.

Although you're advised to avoid immersing it in water, Sony says the Z5 Compact is 'waterproof' as long as the flaps over the SIM and microSD card ports are closed, and if it gets messy you can wash it under the tap. That's further than Apple is prepared to go: even though the latest iPhones seem fairly likely to survive a dunking, any exposure to liquids invalidates your warranty.

Last year's iPhone 6 is now on sale at £459. It's a superb device and has the elegance and ease of use of Apple's software. But with just 16GB of storage, which can't be expanded, it won't carry many photos, apps or film downloads. Among Android rivals, Samsung's Galaxy S6 is similarly priced and equally well specified, so if you like a bigger screen, that's the one to go for. But the 32GB Z5 Compact is an excellent phone with no compromises at a fair price.

SPECIFICATIONS

4.6in 1280x720-pixel screen • 23-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 32GB flash storage • MicroSD card slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 3G/4G • Android 5.1 • 127x65x8.9mm (HxWxD) • 138g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/18340

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VERDICT: It's good to see Sony challenging Apple in design-conscious hardware, and the Z5 Compact is better value than the iPhone

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPhone 6 £459 Reduced to about £30 more than the Z5, last year's iPhone is a strong competitor but its 16GB of storage is limiting

CAMERA | **£499** from Jessops www.snipca.com/18436

Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ330

All the camera you'll ever need

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

The best camera, they say, is the one you have with you. Smartphones have cracked that, but they can't match the flexibility of a full-size camera.

'Bridge' cameras like this one sit between basic compacts (including phones) and professional cameras for people who don't mind hauling a bag of stuff around that cost more than their car. With a 24x zoom lens built in, the FZ330 can capture almost anything you point it at. And its optical image stabilisation (OIS) can compensate for small accidental movements in any direction, so if you wobble while taking a picture it'll still come out sharp.

OIS is even more helpful with video. Because a hand-held camera is unsteady, it can produce a 'shakycam' feel. OIS reduces this significantly. The FZ330 can shoot at 4K resolution for more detail – though this does make video files huge and harder to edit. We'd stick to 1080p Full HD for now, and the FZ330 is good at that too, although there are no fancy features like slow motion.

> "Offers loads of options and takes great quality photos at high speed"

For stills, the FZ330 can shoot raw images, storing what's captured by its image sensor (the chip that takes the picture) without any processing. When you open the image in raw-compatible software on your PC, you can adjust things like exposure and white balance (how warm or cold the light is) without losing any quality. This is good for photo enthusiasts, but everyone else can just shoot JPEGs. You can transfer files and even control the camera via Wi-Fi.

The LCD touchscreen makes it easy to frame your photos and use the various options, or you can simply press your eye against the viewfinder. There are plenty of buttons and dials if you like to use manual settings, but if not, you can leave everything on automatic. Flash is built in, and there's a mount for a video light or other accessories. The rechargeable battery is rated to last 380 photos – not generous but adequate. Speed, on the other hand is more than adequate: you can shoot 12.5 pictures per second, or 7.2 with autofocus. When you're taking one photo at a time, the camera autofocuses in 0.2 seconds and is ready for the next shot in 0.3.

The best feature of the FZ330 is its lens, which has a constant f/2.8 aperture. Here's what that means. Aperture dictates how much light the lens can let in. It's given as a ratio of focal length, 'f'. The lower the number, the better. Shooting with a 'wide open' aperture gives you shallow depth of field, so you can get one object in focus while the foreground or background is blurred. If you need everything in focus, you can choose a higher 'f' number.

The FZ330's maximum of f/2.8 qualifies as a 'fast' aperture, beating the lenses supplied with most affordable cameras. And, unusually, that speed doesn't fall as you zoom in. That's good news for sports and wildlife photographers. Not only can you bring the action closer, but you can also take a picture with a very short exposure to 'freeze' the action. There's also a 'macro' mode that lets you focus as close as 1cm with a wide shot or one metre when fully zoomed, so a small object can fill the frame. This also applies to video.

12 megapixels (4000x3000) may not sound a lot, but you'll never need more unless you want to crop in to part of a photo, which shouldn't be necessary when you have a big zoom. Even if you just point and shoot, the FZ330 can do far more than your phone. There's lots of potential when you want to get creative.

SPECIFICATIONS

12-megapixel sensor • 24x zoom (25-600mm) • 4K (3840x2160-pixel) video • 3in screen • SDXC card slot • Wi-Fi • 93x133x122mm (HxWxD) • 703g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/18438

VERDICT: If you only ever buy one more camera, it should be the FZ330. It's not cheap, but look out for discounts once a few months have passed

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Panasonic DMC-FZ1000 £599 Despite a shorter zoom (falls to f/4.0), this camera's larger sensor gives a more professional picture quality

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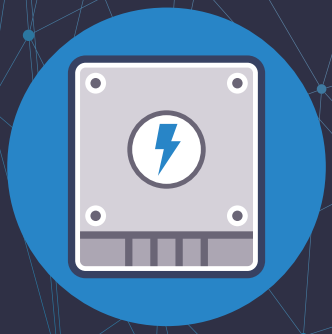

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VIDEO-STREAMING DEVICE | **£30** from Google Store www.snipca.com/18354

Google Chromecast (2015)

Watch everything on your telly

Google's Chromecast, released in 2013, is a gizmo the size of a memory stick that plugs into the HDMI port on your flatscreen TV. This new version, still just called Chromecast, looks different but does the same job: it plays video from the internet to your TV, and is controlled by your smartphone, tablet or computer.

This Chromecast, though, is a two-inch puck, available in black, yellow(ish) or red, with its HDMI plug attached by a short rubber strap. It fits more easily into awkwardly positioned sockets. But if your sockets are on the side of the TV, the Chromecast dangles off the edge, looking a little untidy. Also less than neat is the separate microUSB power cable that has to connect the unit to the supplied mains adapter. Some TVs have USB ports that you can use instead, but not all can supply sufficient power.

As soon as you've plugged it in and switched the TV to the correct input source, the Chromecast will display instructions to get you all set up. It connects to your Wi-Fi network, and you manage it using the free Chromecast app on your iOS or Android smartphone or tablet, Mac or Windows PC. A forthcoming update to this app will help you find videos you might like to watch. For now, however, the app doesn't have much to do, because you send video to the Chromecast box directly from other apps, such as BBC iPlayer, YouTube or Netflix. Simply tap the Chromecast icon in those apps and the picture appears on your TV. You can then use your phone or tablet as a remote control. If you need to do something else on it, like check your email, your video will keep playing.

Because the Chromecast box receives video directly from whichever online service you're using, it won't run down your device's battery. But it's not designed to play media you own, such as films stored on a hard drive. There are ways to achieve that, including third-party apps, but they may not be reliable. Similarly, you can mirror unsupported Android apps to your TV, or play video from websites using Google's Chrome browser, but the video quality may not be as smooth or sharp. Unlike with Apple's AirPlay, you can't mirror your iPhone or iPad to the Chromecast; it's limited to specific apps.

Do you need a streaming gadget like Chromecast? If you have a reasonably new TV, it probably already has things like Netflix and YouTube built in. And unless you're currently using it as a doorstop, you probably have a Freeview, cable or satellite box.

If you mainly use Apple devices, the new Apple TV does a lot more than the Chromecast. With the ability to run apps itself, including games, it's an all-in-one entertainment system as well as the best way to stream media from iPhones, iPads and Macs. It's the only streamer that works with Apple's own iTunes Store. But it's a lot more expensive (from £60).

Other rivals include Roku's Streaming Stick (£50 from www.snipca.com/18358), which has more compatible apps and its own remote control, and can already search for videos across apps; and Amazon's Fire TV Stick (£35 from www.snipca.com/18360), which supports Amazon's Prime Video subscription service. The Fire TV Stick even lets you search by voice, which is useful if you find it hard to read lists. The Fire's standard remote control doesn't have a microphone for this, but you can do it from the phone or tablet app or pay £10 extra for a 'voice remote'.

SPECIFICATIONS

802.11ac Wi-Fi • HDMI plug • 1080p Full HD • 13.5x52x52mm (HxWxD) • Requires a device with Android 4.1, iOS 7.0, OS X 10.7 or Windows 7/8/10 • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18355

VERDICT: The Chromecast is fairly flexible and enticingly cheap, but like all these streaming products your decision to buy or not will rest on the apps and services you use

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVES: Amazon Fire TV Stick £35 Includes a remote and is the best choice for Prime subscribers, but not as flexible. The pricier Roku Streaming Stick £50 has the most content options

VIDEO-STREAMING BOX | **£80** from Amazon www.snipca.com/18386

Amazon Fire TV (4K)

A sharper way to watch online video

Do we *really* need 4K? Short answer: no. Now, here's the science. Digital displays are made up of pixels, or colour dots. If the grid of pixels is fine enough, you don't see the dots, just the picture. What's enough? That doesn't just depend on the pixels, it also depends on you. Specifically, how sharp your eyesight is and how far from the screen you are.

Apple came up with the term 'Retina display' for a screen that will fool 20:20 vision at a typical distance. A Full HD TV doesn't have as many pixels as a Retina iPhone or iPad, and it's much bigger, making the pixels huge. So it should look really rough – but it doesn't, because you don't hold your telly up to your face. When you do the maths, a 40in Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) TV is a 'Retina display' as long as you sit at least 1.5 metres away. QED.

> "Even normal HD video gets a benefit from the revamped Fire TV"

Yet TV makers want to sell you sets with four times more pixels, and now Amazon has a black box that receives video from its Prime service at this '4K' resolution, where available. In reality very few films or TV shows are available yet in 4K, and you probably don't have a 4K telly anyway, and unless it's gigantic you won't see much difference. Oh, and the Fire TV can only output 4K at 30Hz (cycles per second), not the rock-steady 60Hz of higher-quality systems.

Even normal HD video gets a benefit from the revamped Fire TV, though: it supports a format called HEVC that downloads faster, meaning your favourite programme is less likely to grind to a halt. Services such as BBC iPlayer, ITV Player and Netflix are also supported, and as with Google's Chromecast (see opposite page) you can control video from iOS or Android apps or mirror Android screens. But Amazon takes every chance to sell you its own content, and the Fire TV works best with Prime, which costs £79 a year after the free first month.

The new box can also run some basic games, such as Angry Birds and Grand Theft Auto III, but you need a special £40 controller – yet another way for Amazon to grab your money. As standard, you get a remote control with voice search, just like the new Apple TV, to help find videos you want to watch, although the search features could be more comprehensive.

VERDICT: 4K is a gimmick, but the Fire TV is good for people who watch a lot of online video and especially Prime subscribers. If you have Apple devices, the new Apple TV may suit you better

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Roku 3 £100

This box has similar features and support from an excellent range of video channels, but not Amazon Prime. Its standard remote works for games, but not voice

SPECIFICATIONS

802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 8GB storage • microSD slot • USB 2.0 port • HDMI port • Ethernet port • 4K UHD (requires TV with HDCP 2.2) • Remote with voice • 17.8x115x115mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18387

The best... Photo printers

Canon Pixma Pro-100S

£375 from www.snipca.com/17453

This pricey printer can really make your pictures shine. A full-page glossy print gives you vibrant and accurate colours. While blacks are not quite as deep as they could be, dark areas show plenty of detail. The eight dye-based inks fade faster than the pigment-based 'archival' colours used by more expensive professional printers.

Epson Expression Photo XP-760

£122 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18484

Reproducing subtle gradations, especially in the lightest and darkest areas, demands an accurate print head and appropriate inks. The Expression Photo XP-760 is a decent general-purpose A4 multi-function printer. The printer is especially good for photos on glossy paper, with excellent colour accuracy and sharpness.

Canon Pixma iP8750

£200 from PC World www.snipca.com/18485

This A3+ inkjet printer takes paper more than twice A4 size and uses six inks to output excellent photos. It looks neat when closed, but quite clunky with the paper trays folded out. Colour quality isn't perfect – some dark tones are a bit muddy – but its ability to print incredibly tiny dots ensures clear detail and smooth shading in lighter areas.

Polaroid Zip Printer

£110 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18482

This 186g portable printer will output 25 photos after charging for an hour and a half. Install the iOS or Android app and you can print wirelessly via Bluetooth. The packs of paper (£20 for 100 prints) have colour pigments built in, and each photo comes out in under a minute. Just 2x3in, about the size of a business card, the cards have a peel-off sticky back.

HOME AUTOMATION SYSTEM | From **£35** from Elgato www.snipca.com/18369

Elgato Eve

Connect your home

Everybody got very excited when Apple announced HomeKit, a home-automation system. That was back in June 2014. Then nothing happened. Then nothing happened some more.

To be fair, a few months is nothing in the history of home automation. It's been a computer-industry theme since the 1980s, after *Tomorrow's World* imagined it in the 1970s. But adverts were promising it in the 1940s. The Victorians had a mechanical contraption for every task. And mostly we were all just reinventing the Romans' ideas, with their running water, clocks and under-floor heating.

The ancient Greeks, meanwhile, left us the Antikythera mechanism (see Wikipedia page: www.snipca.com/18396), which looks very much like a modern central-heating timer. Of course, nobody knows its exact function... unlike the Antikythera mechanism. Boom! Boom!

Anyway, a mere 2,000-odd years later, the first products built to work with HomeKit have started to appear. Elgato's Eve isn't so much about automating your home as quantifying it, much like fitness

> "A hint of what HomeKit can do, but it's too soon to invest in it with confidence"

accessories quantify your health. Eve Room (£70) measures humidity and air quality indoors. By 'air quality' it means the presence of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These can come from all kinds of activities: a new carpet, painting your nails, smoking, cooking dinner. So the significance of the level is vague, but if it's high you might want to open a window.

What if you remember after going to bed that you might have left it open? Eve Door & Window (£35) will tell you whether a door or window is open or shut. Finally, Eve Weather (£45) takes temperature, humidity and air pressure (like a barometer). Logically enough, this one's splashproof.

The Eve app, which only works on Apple devices, records all the information from whichever of these units you have, at intervals from hourly to monthly. You can look at its neat charts, or just ask Siri (Apple's voice assistant), for the latest info. It's all quite clever, but it only works when the device running the app, such as your iPhone, is within Bluetooth Smart wireless range of the sensors. That means you have to be at home.

To communicate with the Eve units remotely, you need a HomeKit 'hub' to connect them to the internet. So far, the only one is the Apple TV (either the recent third-generation model or the brand new one with the fancy remote control). Eve is much more useful when you can access it from afar, but it still won't send you notifications when something changes; you have to check in. Even then, you can't actually do anything about it from the app.

If, say, the humidity in your bedroom is high, you might want to turn on a dehumidifier before heading for home. The ultimate goal of home automation – as an integral part of what's now called 'the internet of things' – is for this to be done from the app, without you even necessarily having to do anything. That won't really be possible until every appliance is 'smart', which in turn doesn't seem likely unless everyone agrees on a standard system, rather than one like HomeKit that's proprietary to a company like Apple. Hmm.

But the Eve Energy module, coming to the UK soon, gets you half-way there. It's an adapter that will sit between the mains plug and an appliance – such as a humidifier – and turn it on or off when the app tells it to. It also measures how much energy is used, so you can balance comfort against efficiency.

You'd need lots of them to change your life, and they're too expensive for that. But the Eve units are well made and give a hint of what HomeKit can do.

SPECIFICATIONS

Bluetooth 4.0 Smart wireless connection • Internet-enabled via Apple TV • Requires iPhone, iPad or iPod touch with iOS 8.4 or later (future options may require iOS 9) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18370

VERDICT: It's still too soon to invest in HomeKit with confidence, but Eve could be a contender when things start getting interesting

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung SmartThings From £30 This HomeKit rival has lots of sensors already available and works with iOS, Android and Windows Phone, but will it catch on?

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PRINTER | **£69** from Amazon www.snipca.com/18409

HP Officejet Pro 6830

For the busy office... if you're patient

Marketing a computer product? Want to charge more for it? Don't bother making it work better – just write 'Pro' after the name! It's a useful tip that HP long ago took to heart with its Officejet Pro printer series. This time, though, it's forgotten to bump up the price. The Officejet Pro 6830 really does look like a professional machine, with its bulky, but business-like shape and a big automatic document feeder (ADF) on the top. Yet it's under 70 quid. Could it be a bargain by any other name?

Not really. This multi-function inkjet has wired and wireless networking, a good-quality colour touchscreen, a flatbed scanner on top that can digitise or photocopy up to 35 pages at once, and automatic double-sided (duplex) printing. If you have a telephone socket handy, it can even send and receive faxes, or could do if anyone else still had a fax machine in 2015. It's just that doing any of this is, well, a bit of a pain.

The 250-sheet paper tray doesn't detach for loading, but we managed to insert a sheaf of A4 with it in place. We then prised it out again to load 6x4in photo paper for our colour tests. When we swapped back to A4, the Officejet Pro 6830 insisted it still had 6x4. Nothing in the menus let us tell it otherwise. Eventually we twigged that although you can't pull the tray out fully, you have to pull it out partially when you change paper, or the printer ignores it.

When we did make printing happen, it was fast, reaching 16.5 pages of text per minute, or 18.1ppm in draft mode. Colour pages weren't too bad at 4.4ppm. Copying from the ADF, however, was much slower, taking two minutes for a 10-page black-and-white document or three-and-a-half minutes for colour. And for single scans, the lid wouldn't close over thick books.

HP's software also bogged us down. Not only does it lack advanced options and convenience features, it also took more than five minutes to coax the scanner through a single 6x4in photo at an enlargement-friendly 1200 dots per inch (dpi). At 600dpi it completed the task in less than 90 seconds, and looked more natural. You could think of this as a decent 600dpi scanner, fine for office use, rather than a slow 1200dpi machine.

Output looked good, though, bearing in mind that this is a machine for office users rather than photo buffs. Ink costs are middling, at just under 5p per colour page.

SPECIFICATIONS

600x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 27ppm colour and 35ppm mono quoted speeds • 1200x1200dpi maximum scan resolution • USB • 802.11n Wi-Fi • 224x462x388mm (HxWxD) • 8kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18410

VERDICT: Lots of features at a very reasonable price, but other printers are much easier to use

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Brother MFC-J5320DW £81 This similarly equipped printer works better and can print A3 when required. Its lower running costs will soon make back the extra £12

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best PC for my needs?

Q **I need to replace my old Windows Vista Medion PC. My main activities involve email, browsing, Word, Serif PhotoPlus, PagePlus and MoviePlus. Ideally, I'm looking for an Intel i5 processor, a DVD drive and Windows 10. I'd also consider an all-in-one PC. Any suggestions?**

John Jackson

A Performance-wise, an all-in-one PC is more like a laptop than a desktop, but they're not always good value. An exception is Lenovo's C50 (see photo), which has an Intel i5 processor and a 23in Full HD screen (£600 from www.snipca.com/18474). It has a DVD drive and Windows 8.1 (which can be upgraded free to Windows 10). The dual-core i5 processor might struggle with 1080p video editing, but would be helped by the Nvidia GeForce 820M graphics card in software that uses it, such as Pinnacle Studio 19 (from £50, www.snipca.com/18475).

The Vibox Exile (£600 with monitor from www.snipca.com/18160 – reviewed in Issue 461) is an option, but has no room for a DVD drive. You could add an external drive, such as Samsung's slim SE-208GB/RSGD (£17.50 from www.snipca.com/18477). Palicomp's Intel i5 Elite (£600 from www.snipca.com/16709, reviewed in Issue 452) has a faster processor and a DVD drive, but no monitor.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

SMARTPHONE PROJECTOR
£18 from Luckies www.snipca.com/18481

Luckies Smartphone Projector

See the bigger picture

Digital projectors are complex pieces of kit, but this one goes back to basics to project an image from your smartphone for under 20 quid. First you have to build the projector, which arrives as a couple of sheets of cardboard and an impressive-looking glass lens.

The instructions (printed on the inside of the packing box) are clear, but you'll need your own glue – superglue is recommended, which seemed an odd choice for cardboard, but it worked.

The card is stiff, and folds into multiple layers, so the finished item feels quite sturdy. It's constructed like a giant matchbox, with an inner section that slides in and out. Your phone fixes inside the far end on to a plate of clingy plastic material. Sliding the box lets you focus the image of the phone's screen, cast by the lens at the opposite end, on to whatever's in front, preferably a white blank vertical surface.

We tried it with an iPhone (though the box is too small for phablets such as the iPhone 6s Plus), which has a relatively bright screen. Even in the darkest room we could create, the best image we got was pretty small and relatively dim. And backwards. The instructions tell you to use the 'rotate screen' option on your phone, but anyone who's done geometry at primary school knows 'rotate' is not the same as 'mirror'. Locking rotation means you can put your phone in upside-down, so the image appears right side up, but it's still reversed.

We emailed the manufacturer and received a prompt reply admitting that this was just the way it worked – to be fair, the website does mention that 'any text will appear in reverse'. They offered a refund if we weren't happy. That's good service, but bad documentation: 'rotate' and 'mirror' are conflated in the instructions. Sadly, watching a film flipped right to left is too confusing to put up with to DNE EHT.

SPECIFICATIONS
Cardboard projector kit • Glass lens • Requires any smartphone up to 145x80mm • 100x210x170mm (HxWxD) www.snipca.com/18480

VERDICT: This is a nice idea and a very well made kit, but it doesn't really serve any purpose except a basic demonstration of optics

★★☆☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Philips PicoPix PPX2055 £153 It's noisy, not very sharp and not as bright as a full-size model, but this is about the cheapest real projector you can get

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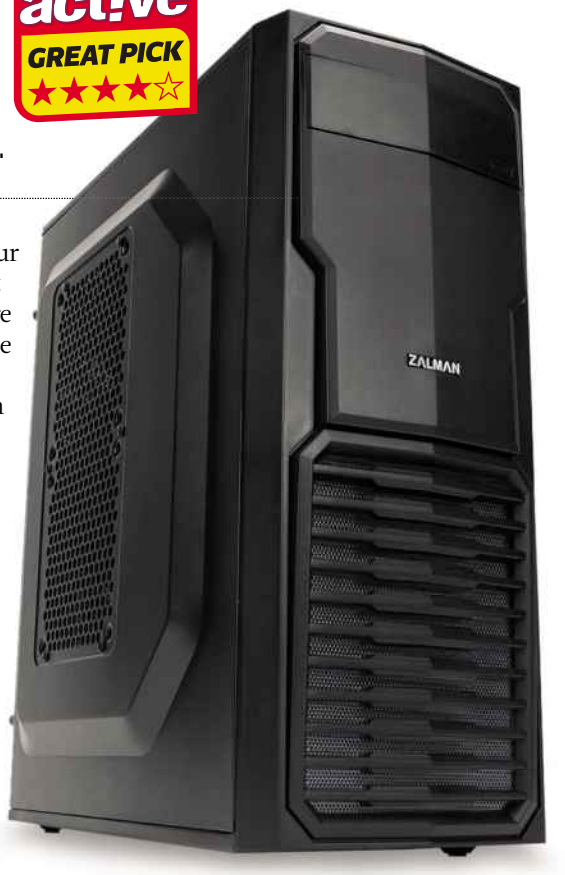
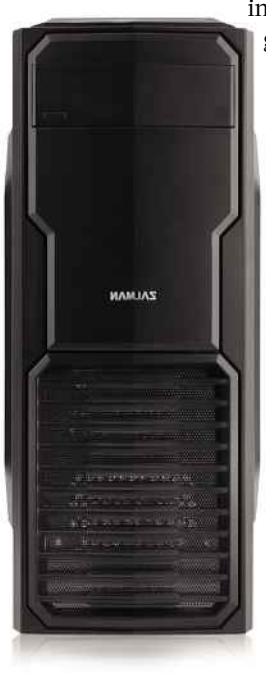


Everyone knows the 'Intel Inside' jingle. It sounds like a particularly annoying doorbell. You'd probably imagine someone got paid millions of dollars to spend weeks honing the five-note chime for maximum chip-selling effect. You'd be roughly correct. It was an Austrian musician called Walter Werzowa, who also had a number five UK hit in 1988 with the techno-pop band Edelweiss.

Mr Werzowa probably didn't make millions, because he didn't retain the copyright to the riff, which is now played somewhere in the world every five minutes, according to a popular made-up statistic. But he did a good job. In 1999, five years after it was composed from 'instruments' including a tambourine, an anvil, an electric spark, a xylophone, bells and a hammer, the jingle was praised by Business Marketing magazine as having 'created a preference for computer chips'.

> "Occasionally, you can hear a bubbling reminiscent of a tropical aquarium"

Before Intel Inside, in other words, we didn't much care who made the processors in our PCs. Now we do. That can't have helped Intel's struggling rival AMD, whose chips have in recent years declined in popularity despite the 'AMD in the middle' campaign, with its instantly recognisable arpeggio played by a New Zealander on three banjos and an electric whisk.



OK, we made that last bit up. But here's a Windows 10 PC that does have AMD in the middle: the company's Athlon X4 860K processor, to be precise. With four cores running at 3.7GHz, it's not quite as powerful as an Intel Core i5 chip, but it is a lot cheaper. The trade-off is that it becomes very hot, so it makes sense to put it in a tower system, like this one, where there's plenty of room for air to circulate.

However, during its development, Chillblast evidently found that air wasn't enough. So, just like your car, this PC is water-cooled. Yes, there are actual pipes and a pump. Occasionally, you can hear a bubbling reminiscent of a tropical aquarium. It's a closed system, so it shouldn't require maintenance, and it does seem to work, even if it's a Heath Robinson arrangement more commonly associated with extreme-performance computers.

That's not what the Fusion Drone is. The Athlon can multitask a few apps and web pages without any trouble, and photo editing is manageable, but HD video production would be pushing it, let alone 4K. The Radeon R7 370 graphics card (also made by AMD) is another budget choice, but it did surprisingly well in our tests, running older 3D games in Full HD and even coping with the most advanced games once we'd fiddled with the quality settings. That's impressive for a £500 PC.

A reasonable 8GB of memory is included, which you could upgrade to 16GB when ordering or by swapping the RAM modules yourself at a later date. Storage is provided by a hybrid drive which pairs 8GB of flash memory with a 1TB mechanical hard drive, giving you lots of space with slightly quicker response than a standard drive. There are plenty of ports, including three USB 3.0 connections for fast storage.

The case, Zalman's Mini T4 V2, looks understated and takes up an unusually small area for a tower PC, but has room for five extra drives, including DVD or Blu-ray if you want, and one PCI-Express – handy for adding Wi-Fi. There's also an old-style PCI slot for more basic add-ons. The combination of capable components, a quality case and a five-year warranty (labour-only for the last three years) makes the Fusion Drone a great option.

SPECIFICATIONS

3.7GHz quad-core AMD Athlon X4 860K processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hybrid drive • AMD Radeon R7 370 graphics • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 5x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet • HDMI port • DisplayPort • 2x DVI ports • WIndows 10 • 427x348x170mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/18452

VERDICT: A water-cooled budget PC that delivers good performance at an affordable price

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Vibox Exile £600 An extra £100 gets you this attractively styled mini-tower with a quad-core Intel i5 and Nvidia's superior GTX 960 graphics card

LAPTOP | **£620** from Very www.snipca.com/18498

Acer Aspire V3-574G (Core i5)

All the PC you need, in an affordable laptop

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Let's assume for a moment that you're not made of money. Put down your lead crystal flute of Krug, tell the jazz pianist to hold the tinkling, and hand those models some bathrobes. Now picture yourself sitting on an ordinary chair in an ordinary room, reading a well-known computer magazine and planning to buy a new PC. You have an ordinary person's cash to spend – say, £650.

Portability, processing power, graphics: at this price, you can't have it all. But wait: here's the Aspire V3-574G. It's not the greatest system money can buy. But it's an excellent laptop with a Full HD screen, a proper graphics card and a huge hard drive. And it leaves you with nearly 30 quid change from your reasonable budget. Ordinary isn't so bad after all.

At 2.4kg, this 15.6in machine is fairly heavy, but not too hard to carry. Its lid has a black aluminium texture that catches the light rather stylishly. The keyboard part has a cheaper-looking plastic finish, but the keys feel fine; the edges are backlit, though not the letter and number labels. The touchpad works very smoothly.

Inside is a modest but effective dual-core Intel i5 processor and mid-range Nvidia GeForce 940M graphics. General and creative tasks flew along in our tests, and although the latest games won't work at maximum settings, you can get almost anything running by reducing the resolution or quality level.

Two fast USB 3.0 ports connect storage and peripherals, and there's a USB 2.0 for a mouse on the right. With a full-size HDMI port and an old-school VGA, you can quickly attach a monitor or TV. Top-notch 802.11ac Wi-Fi is included, and the 2TB hard drive is unusually generous for a laptop. The battery lasted us four hours and 22 minutes of moderate use, which, for an affordable, full-size laptop, isn't too shabby.

The 1920x1080-pixel screen is very sharp at this size. You may need to adjust Windows 10's scaling if text and icons look too small. Colours are a little drab, but it's bright, and visible from a good range of angles. Set aside an hour or two for the free upgrade from Windows 8.1 to 10, and you've got an up-to-date, general-purpose PC.

There are many versions of this machine, so check the specifications if you're shopping around. The price will be a bit lower if you opt for 8GB of memory, a smaller hard drive or a coarser 1366x768-pixel screen, or higher for an i7 processor.

VERDICT: Good performance for the price, as long as display quality isn't critical to your work

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Dell Inspiron 15 5558 £549 The Full HD screen is sharper, but still dull. Battery life is shorter and the graphics card not quite as fast

SPECIFICATIONS

2.2GHz Intel Core i5-5200U dual-core processor • 12GB memory • 2TB hard drive • 2GB Nvidia GeForce 940M graphics • 15.6in 1920x1080-pixel screen • Webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • DVD writer • Windows 8.1 (free upgrade to Windows 10) • 30.3x382x256mm (HxWxD) • 2.4kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18499

COMING SOON

WINTER 2015

Marketed in America as 'the perfect phone for imperfect people', Motorola's new batch of Droid smartphones includes the Turbo 2, which has a shatterproof screen. It's likely to be tougher than your average Gorilla Glass.

WINTER 2015

HP's Envy 8 Note, coming soon for around £300, is an 8in tablet that piggy-backs on a high-quality full-size aluminium keyboard. A stylus is also provided, although it's not super-accurate like the iPad Pro's Pencil.

WINTER 2015

Asus' forthcoming VivoStick (around £100) joins the band of PCs that are so small they barely exist. It's a dongle that plugs into an HDMI port with Windows 10, 2GB of RAM, 32GB of storage, two USB 2.0 ports and a headphone jack.

WINTER 2015

Apple has added a 4K-resolution display option to its 21.5in iMac range (£899, www.snipca.com/18266), while the Asus Zen AiO S PC is available soon from £800. The latter offers more specifications and comes in two sizes with regular or 4K screens.

NEXT ISSUE

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A £200 laptop ready for Windows 10

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H

£295 from www.snipca.com/18151
Tested: Issue 446

Asus has made all the right choices with this budget Windows 8.1 laptop. Its comfortable keyboard, fast performance, respectably lengthy battery life and bright screen are all the more impressive given its low price.

ALTERNATIVE Asus Chromebook C200 A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and a great keyboard. £209 from www.snipca.com/17296

DESKTOP PC

PC Specialist Trion 960

£650 from www.snipca.com/17254
Tested: Issue 454

You could spend less on a usable PC, but this solid tower system has great all-round performance, including a decent Nvidia GTX 960 graphics card. A 120GB SSD and 1TB hard drive offers speed and space, but Wi-Fi costs £15 extra.

ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp Intel i5 Elite For £50 less, this is a similar PC in many respects, but compromises on graphics with the cheaper GTX 750 card. £600 from www.snipca.com/17297

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 4

£319 from www.snipca.com/18100
Tested: Issue 460

The 2015 update to Apple's 7.9in tablet greatly improves the screen and camera, boosts performance, and makes it worth the £100 extra over the iPad mini 2 (still a good budget buy). Go for the £399 64GB version if you can, though.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2 The 9.7in option is still slim and light, also has Touch ID and Apple Pay, and the range of apps beats Android. £399 from www.snipca.com/18139

PHONE

Apple iPhone 6s

£539 from www.snipca.com/18240
Tested: Issue 461

It may look like last year's model, but this update is stronger and faster, with a higher-resolution camera, time-saving 3D Touch features and an excellent screen. The bigger 6s Plus has better battery life.

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play Motorola's fun phone may be plasticky, but it runs Android 5 smoothly. The screen, camera and battery life are all big pluses. £270 from www.snipca.com/17934

DIGITAL CAMERA

Sony A5000

£249 from www.snipca.com/18505
Tested: Issue 428

This compact system camera (CSC) is an affordable way to get into shooting with interchangeable lenses. The APS-C sensor gives great image quality for the money though the controls are a bit basic.

ALTERNATIVE: Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ330 If you prefer to do it all with one lens, this combines 24x zoom with a bright f/2.8 aperture. £499 from www.snipca.com/18436

E-READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite

£110 from www.snipca.com/17776
Tested: Issue 458

With a new high-resolution screen, the affordable Kindle lacks only automatic brightness adjustment and page-turn buttons (you have to swipe the screen). It's great value as long as you're happy to buy your books from Amazon.

ALTERNATIVE: Kobo Glo HD As good as the Paperwhite, but with more storage, and slightly more compact, this is the independent e-reader to pick. £110 from www.snipca.com/17889

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HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 1200 Triple+ Starter Kit

£119 from www.snipca.com/15369
Tested: Issue 444

Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are the fastest we've ever seen. They're also well designed too, with a passthrough socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link PowerLine AV2 1000HD Gigabit Starter Kit Fast (speeds of up to 1000Mbps), much cheaper and very easy to set up, but the lack of a passthrough socket is frustrating. £43 from www.snipca.com/17836

WEB-DESIGN

Xara Web Designer Premium 11

£70 from www.snipca.com/16955
Tested: Issue 453

This visual web-design program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing HTML code, and sites can be 'responsive', meaning they look right on both big and small screens without extra work. A basic version is also available for half the price.

ALTERNATIVE: Serif WebPlus X8 Comes with lots of templates, but creates separate desktop and mobile versions instead of responsive sites, and can be slow to use. £40 from www.snipca.com/14964

COMPETITION

Win a **Linksys Dual-Band Gigabit Wi-Fi Router**

The WRT1900ACS Dual-Band Gigabit Wi-Fi Router from Linksys delivers speeds of up to 1.3Gbps. It has 512MB of RAM, double the memory of its predecessor, so can transfer large files at much faster speeds. Multiple users can simultaneously play games online, stream movies and transfer files without delays. The four external antennas boost Wi-Fi coverage and improve signal strength. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'linksys' in the subject line by midnight 24 November.

The **Linksys WRT1900ACS Dual-Band Gigabit Wi-Fi Router** is available to buy on Amazon (www.snipca.com/18395) priced £229.99. For more info visit www.linksys.com and follow @Linksys on Twitter.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG6650

£70 from www.snipca.com/17334
Tested: Issue 455

It may look like something that James Bond would have to defuse, but this low-cost, all-in-one printer is an excellent choice. Running costs are reasonable too – buy the XL cartridges and running costs work out at 7.7p per colour page or 2.4p for black and white. This makes it very affordable to run.

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX495 It's slow, and black ink is pricey, but this cheaper MFP has a paper feeder and fax too. £40 from www.snipca.com/17174

SOLID-STATE DRIVES

Crucial BX100 1TB

£235 from www.snipca.com/16017
Tested: Issue 445

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung 850 Pro 256GB An even faster SSD, but it is much more expensive per gigabyte. £110 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£134 from www.snipca.com/11646
Tested: Issue 420

A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless N Day & Night Camera A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £86 from www.snipca.com/15275

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PC Specialist recommends Windows

Windows 10

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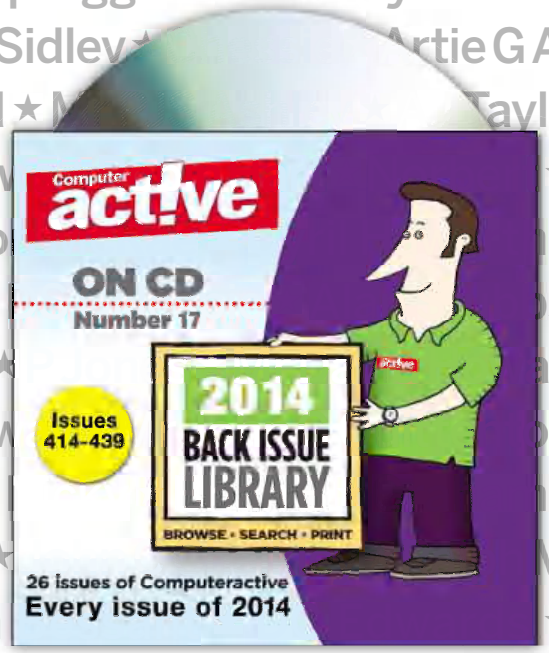
Computer active

Thank You!

★★★★★

We want to say a special thank you to everyone who has given our 2014 Back Issue CD a five-star review on Amazon. That includes...

El Jay "Len" ★ ColChris ★ Mr I Pimlott ★ Bill Daniels1973 ★ Lizzy ★ Dave Harper ★ Sproggit ★ Mr K Meyler ★ Enid ★ MalcolmW ★ A Watt ★ John B ★ Sidley ★ Artie G Artie ★ John Smith ★ Mr A McParland ★ M Taylor ★ P Campbell ★ Ali252 ★ P Matthew ★ Stewart Awbery ★ D Ward ★ Gordo ★ Alan Thomas ★ Stephen Szeles ★ s ★ Mr Rh M Urray ★ Susan Pearson ★ t ★ Stupot ★ Mrs D Long ★ MA Hathaw n ★ Rodney Driver ★ Ms JI Aldridge ★ Deane ★ Colin Z ★ Alan R Marchant ★ Moore ★ Frederick Scott ★ Leighton ★ Martin Perman ★ Maurice McCullough ★ Joe Atkinson ★ Peter Dowsett ★ Michael Kelly ★ David Nelson ★ John H ★ K Harrison ★ Anthony Broom ★ Leslie John Bell ★ Clive Reynolds ★ Andreos Greco



Thanks for all your kind words – we really appreciate it. And thanks in advance to everyone who posts a review.

Our 2014 Back Issue CD is still on sale on Amazon:
www.snipca.com/14981 (or search for 'computeractive cd').
It costs £15, but Amazon often discounts this to around £12.

You can also buy the 2013 CD at www.snipca.com/16010.

Workshops & Tips

PULL OUT & KEEP Issue 462

Edited by Sherwin Coelho

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

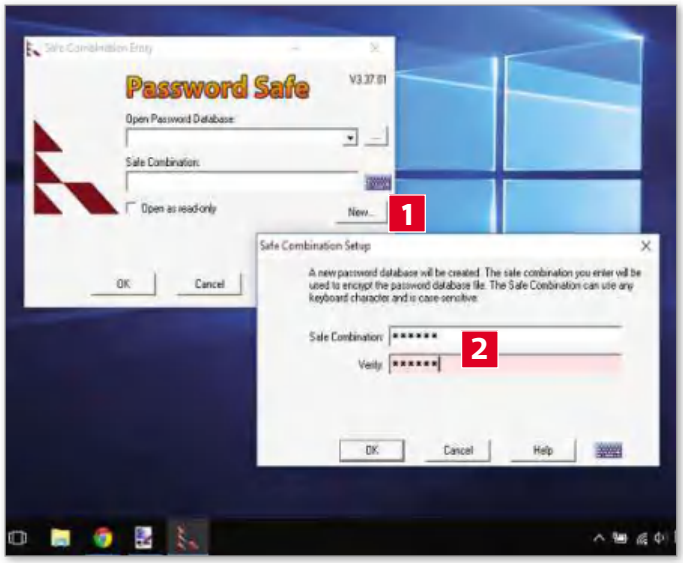
35 Use one password for all your accounts
38 Make your own DVD menus
40 Use Windows Desktop gadgets safely
42 Switch from AVG to Avast

PLUS
43 Readers' Tips
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... LibreOffice 5

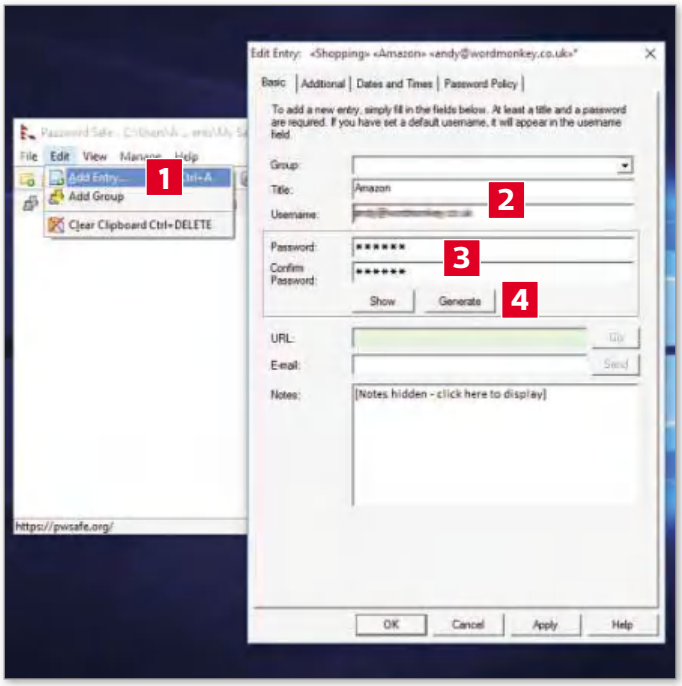
Use one password for all your accounts

What you need: Password Safe; Any version of Windows (XP to 10)
Time required: 30 mins

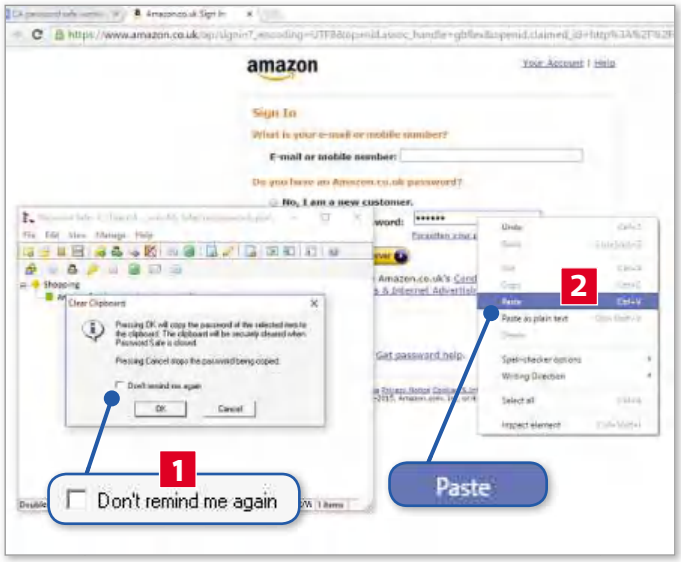
We're constantly being reminded that we should come up with different passwords for all our online services. This is because these sites are often targeted by hackers looking to collect email addresses, usernames and passwords they can use to hack into other sites. All well and good, but how do you remember all those passwords? Password Safe is a handy free program that saves all your passwords and automatically pastes them into your browser when you need them.



STEP 1 Download Password Safe from http://passwordsafe.sourceforge.net by clicking the blue 'Download latest version' link. As you install it you need to choose the type of installation you want. Regular installs the program so it starts with Windows. Green is a portable version if you'd rather run it from a USB stick. Run the downloaded setup file and click New 1. Create your password database by giving it a name and choosing somewhere safe to keep it on your PC – by default, the program creates a My Safes folder in your Documents folder, which is as good a place as any. You then need to type a password and verify it 2. If your password is weak, you'll see a warning.

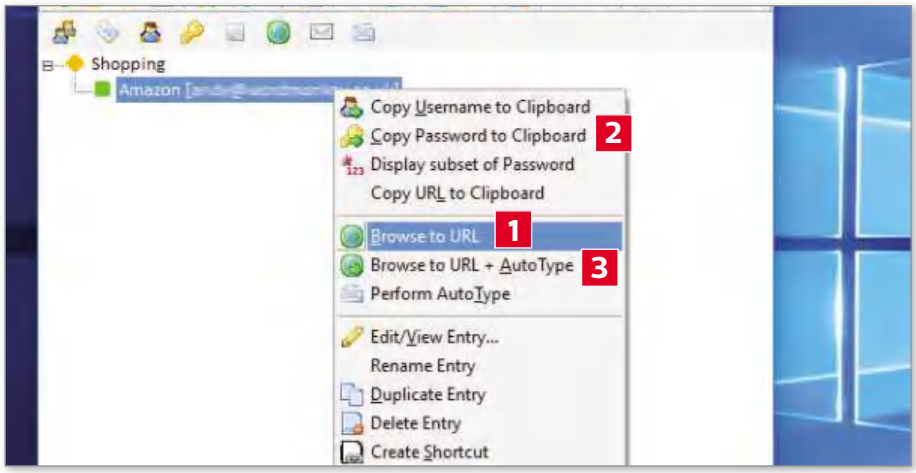


STEP 2 The main window will now open. To add a password, click the Edit menu, then Add Entry 1 (alternatively, use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+A). Enter the name of a site you regularly use in the Title field and your username 2. Enter and confirm your password 3. If it's a site you don't have a password for, Password Safe can create one for you – click the Generate button 4.



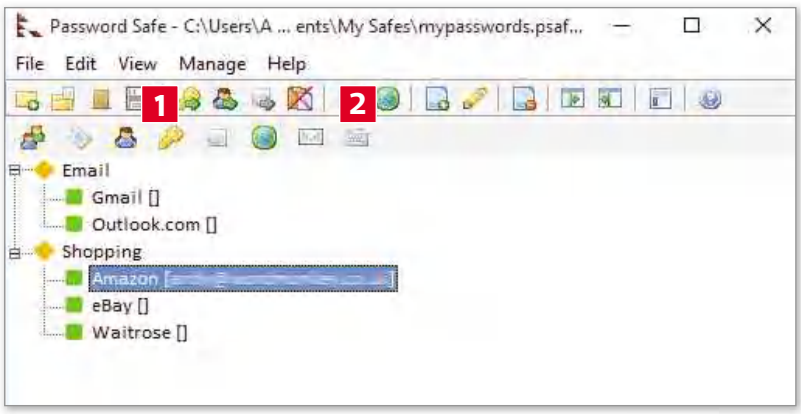
STEP 3 Enter any other relevant information, including the site's URL 1. Try to make this the URL of the sign-in page, because the program will then fill the Username and Password fields automatically. While you're here it's a good idea to put the entry into a Group, by typing the name of a new group at the top 2. If you're saving a lot of passwords this will help you find a specific one more easily. To add a password to an existing group, click the dropdown arrow 3 and select it from the list.

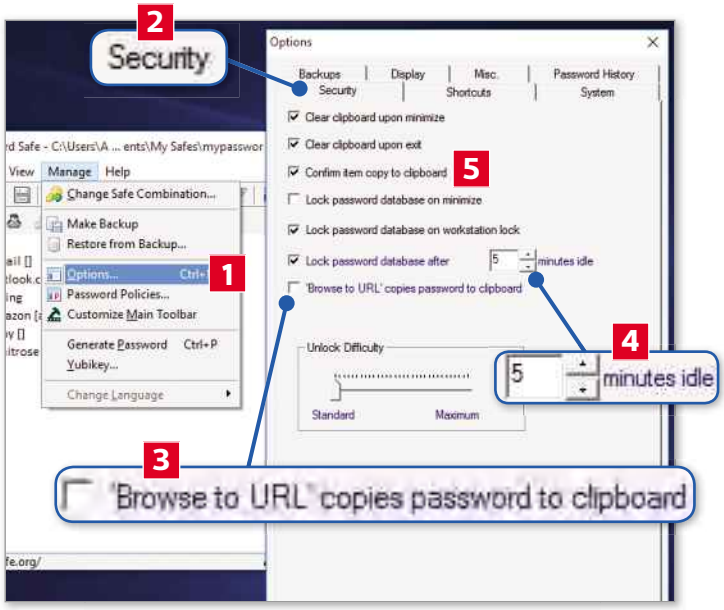
STEP 4 To retrieve and enter a password in the Group list, simply double-click its entry to copy the password to the clipboard, then paste it into the site when you sign in. In the window that pops up tick the 'Don't ask me again' box 1 if you're happy to forego the reminders. Then, when you open the sign-in page, type your username, right-click the password field and choose Paste in the menu 2.



STEP 5 If you entered a URL in Step 3, you can right-click the entry and select 'Browse to URL' 1. This will open the website in your default browser. To save time, you can also use the right-click menu to copy your username or password to the Clipboard 2, then paste them to the appropriate fields on the website. Best of all, if you entered the URL of the site's login page, select 'Browse to URL+AutoType' 3, which will fill in all the site's details for you and log you in automatically.

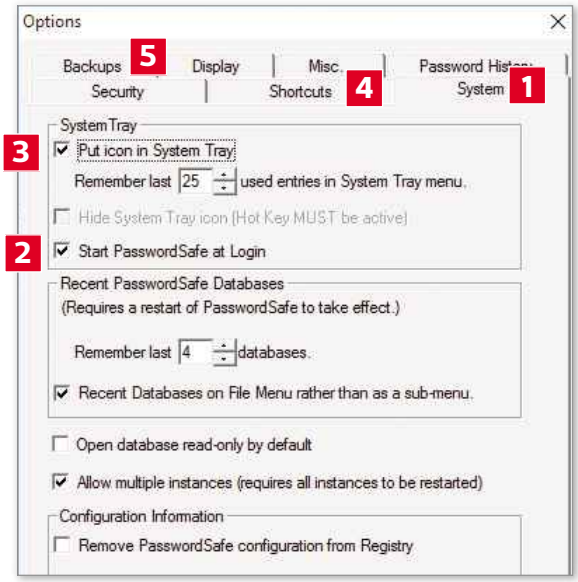
STEP 6 You can also fill out a form with your details by using drag and drop. Open the page you want to log into, then press Alt+Tab to have the Password Safe window open over it. You can then drag and drop the second row of toolbar buttons (Group, Title, User Name, Password, Notes, URL and Email 1) from the Password Safe window on to the sign-in page on the website below. The keyboard icon 2 should initiate the AutoType function, but we had problems making it work.

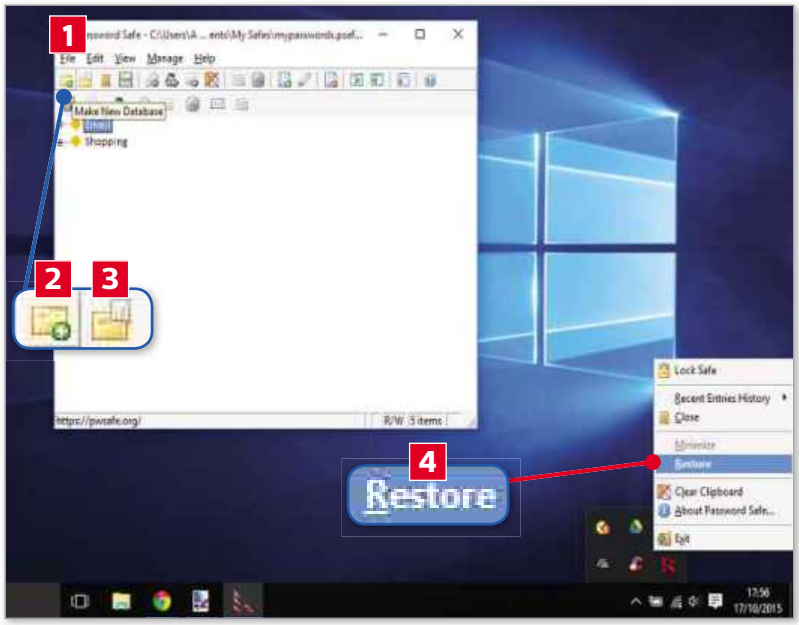




STEP 7 Any changes you make (new passwords, for example) are automatically saved to your password database. By default, the installed version of Password Safe is set to start with Windows. When you're prompted to sign in, make sure the correct database 1 is being opened, then enter your password into the Safe Combination field 2. If you don't want it to launch automatically with Windows or are using the portable version, you'll need to start it manually each time you restart your computer.

STEP 8 To tweak some of the key settings, click the Manage menu, select Options 1, then click the Security tab 2. For example, the 'Browse to URL' tool can be set to also copy the password to the clipboard at the same time 3. You can adjust how soon the program locks after it's been left alone for a period of time 4 (even if you are just using a different program and have it open in the background). You can also turn off the confirmation boxes that pop up when you copy things to the clipboard 5.





STEP 9 The other Options tabs also have useful settings. The System tab 1 lets you set Password Safe to start with Windows 2 and have its icon in the Taskbar 3 ('System Tray'). Other options include creating keyboard shortcuts 4 and automatic backups 5. The Misc tab lets you, among other things, change what happens when you double-click a site and set the Escape key so that pressing it minimises the program window to the notification area.

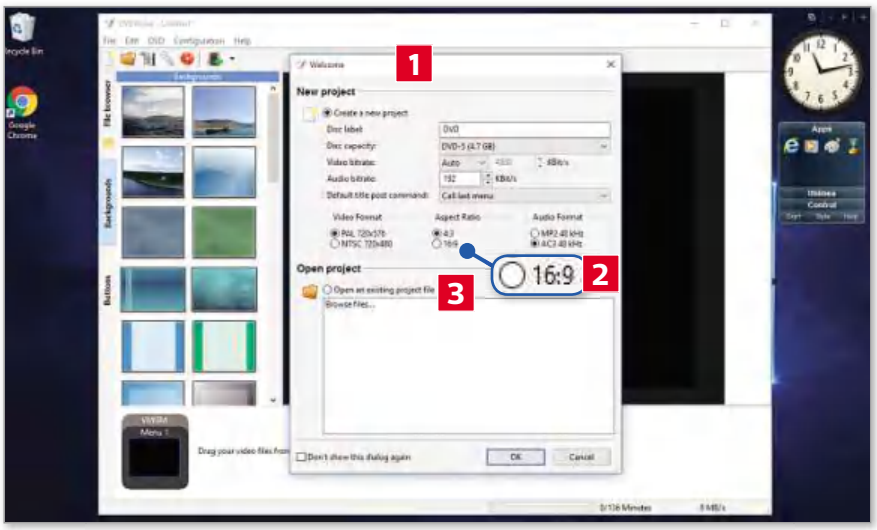
STEP 10 By creating a new database, more than one person can use the same Password Safe program without compromising anyone's passwords. From the File menu 1 choose New, or press the Make New Database button 2. Then create a new password database as you did in Step 1. To switch between databases, choose the one you want from the File menu or click the Open Another Database button 3. If you leave your computer unattended at any time, your database will lock and the program window will be minimised to the Taskbar's notification area. If this happens, right-click its icon and choose Restore 4.

Make your own DVD menus

What you need: DVDStyler; Any version of Windows from XP to 10
Time required: 30 minutes

While YouTube and other video websites provide the opportunity to share your home videos with people over the internet, the best way to enjoy them remains the old-fashioned method of sitting in front of your TV with friends and family. The free program DVDStyler burns high-quality DVDs of your home movies, complete with their own menus, giving them a professional finish. The discs you create can then be played on any standard DVD player.

STEP 1 Download and install the software from www.dvdstyler.org – it doesn't come bundled with unwanted extras. When you open DVDStyler, you'll see the Welcome screen 1. Select the settings you need for your video. The default settings should be fine for most videos, but you might want to change the Aspect Ratio to 16:9 2 if you want your menu to fill a widescreen TV. If you already have a video in progress click 'Open an existing project' 3 to find it listed.



STEP 2 A window will open displaying a selection of templates. You can view them all at the same time or filter by style from the Category menu 1. Type a title for your DVD in the Caption box 2. Stay with the default option of 'Title selection', highlight the template you want to use, then click OK. If you'd prefer to start building your menu from scratch, click the 'No template' button 3 and skip to Step 6.

STEP 3 Your main title screen will now appear, with the title you typed 1. Click the 'File browser' tab 2 and navigate to the video files you want to include on your DVD. Select them and drag them to the section at the bottom. Look closely and you'll see thumbnails of your videos in the chapter menus 3. If your videos aren't already edited into suitable chapter-length sections, you may need to go back and do this with your video-editing software before importing them into DVDStyler.

STEP 4 If you add more than six video clips, DVDStyler will create additional chapter pages to accommodate them. To change your menu background, click the Backgrounds tab 1 and double-click your preferred option from the selection. This will only change the background on the menu you're currently editing, so do this on all the menus for a coherent look. Click a thumbnail to edit it; drag it to reposition it; drag its corners to resize it; or press the Delete key to remove it. These are useful options if you have less than six chapters 2 but want to fill the screen.

STEP 5 You can customise your template by adding your own interface buttons. For example, to put a Home button on each screen, click on Buttons tab 1 and drag the button of your choice on to the menu 2. Double-click the button to tweak it (via a Properties window). For example, your Home button should return you to the first menu, so in the 'Jump to' dropdown menu 3, choose 'VMGM menu 1'. You can also change the appearance of the button in the Look section 4 and fine tune its position 5.

STEP 6 If you chose the 'No template' option in Step 2 you can design your own menu from scratch. You start with a blank screen. Double-click it to add your own background 1. Drag the videos you've added to the bottom section (see Step 3) to create chapter thumbnails 2. Right-click anywhere on the chapter section and choose Add 3 to insert other elements, including shapes, frames, images and text. Any of these can be made into buttons by double-clicking them and setting up 'Jump to' actions (see Step 5).

STEP 7 When you're ready, burn the video by clicking the Burn button 1. In the window that opens, leave the default option in the 'Temp directory' field (needed to create the file before it can be burned to DVD). To run through your video first, tick the 'preview' box 2. To burn straight to a DVD, select the 'burn' option 3. The default settings should work but check the correct drive has been selected and, if you're using one, whether you need to format a DVD-RW. To create a file you can burn to a DVD at a later date, select 'create iso image' 4.

Use Windows Desktop gadgets safely

What you need: 8GadgetPack; Windows 8, 8.1 or 10 **Time required:** 20 mins

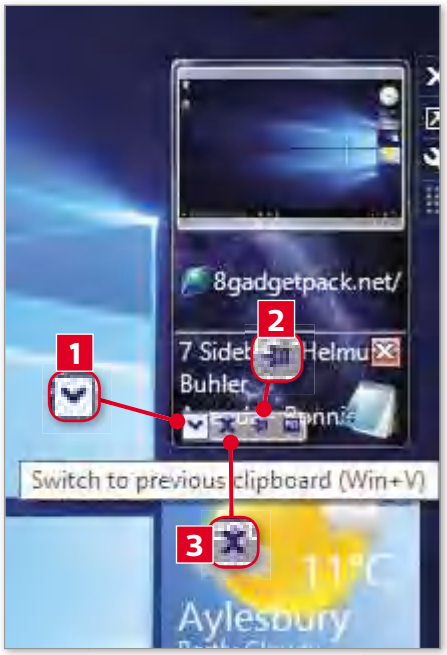
Remember Windows gadgets? These handy little tools used to sit on your Desktop so you had at-a-glance information about incoming emails, what the weather was going to do and what time of day it was. Microsoft built them into Windows Vista, but ditched them in Windows 7 because the Sidebar they ran on suffered from "security vulnerabilities" (read Microsoft's explanation at www.snipca.com/18406). Now you can safely bring them back to Windows 8.1 and 10 with the free 8GadgetPack.

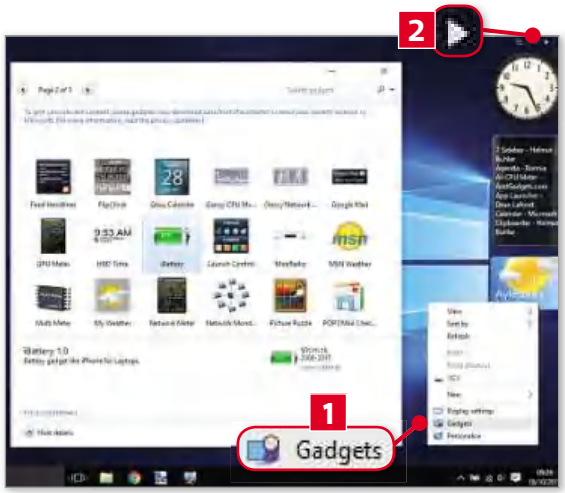
STEP 1 Download and install the software from 8gadgetpack.net. It's free and won't install any unwanted extras. Once it's installed, it will display three gadgets by default – Clock, Clipboard and WeatherCenter. The clock should tell the correct time, but your clipboard will be empty and the weather may show a random location. Change this by clicking the gadget's settings icon (spanner). Click the Location tab and type your location into the box 1. Click the Search button and suggestions will appear below 2. Double-click the one you want, then click OK 3.

WHY IS 8GADGETPACK SAFE?

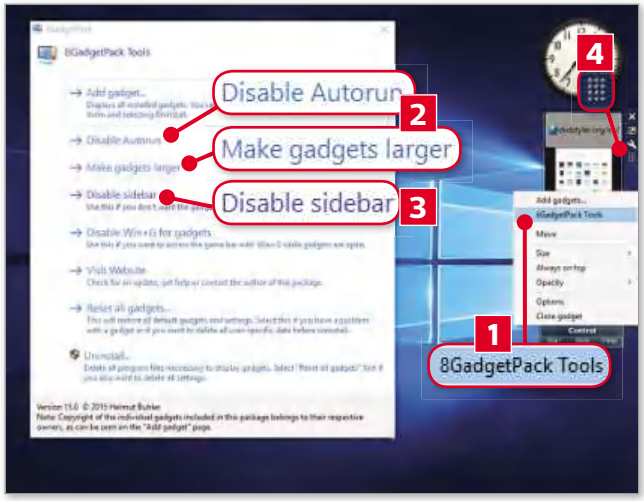
Microsoft removed support for gadgets because the Windows Sidebar they used was unsafe. 8GadgetPack replaces this with its own sidebar, which doesn't contain any security vulnerabilities.

STEP 2 The Clipboard gadget is very useful because it will save everything you've copied and keep a record of it, so you can go back to items you copied previously. Hover over the clipboard and click an item to select it. You can then paste it as you normally would. Double-click a copied item to open it in the relevant app – a URL will open in a browser, for example. At the bottom of the gadget you'll see a mini toolbar. The arrow 1 takes you to the previous item, the pin tool 2 moves an item to the top of the list, and the cross 3 deletes copied items you no longer want to keep.

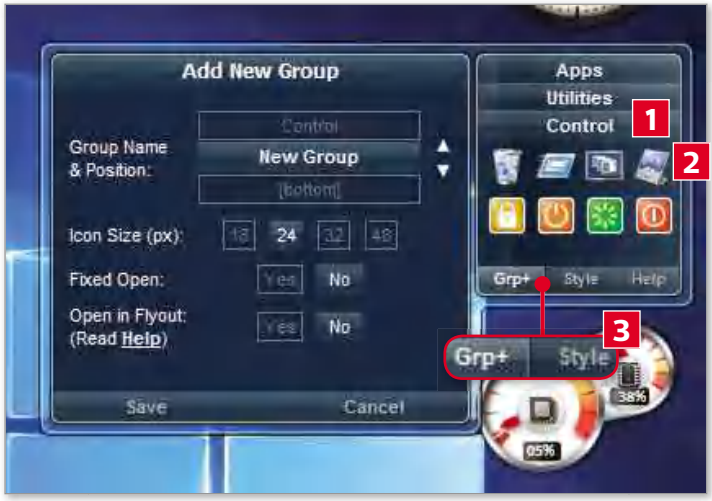




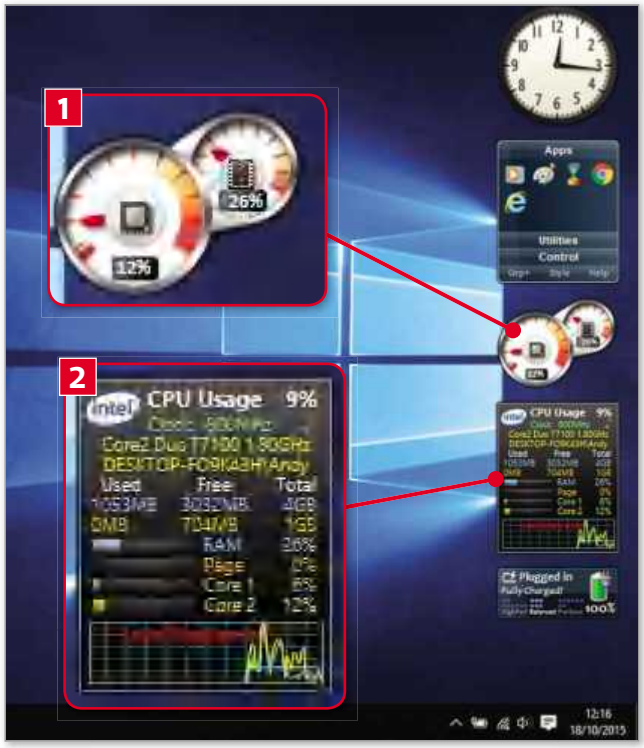
STEP 3 To add more gadgets, right-click anywhere on your Desktop and click Gadgets 1. There are three pages of gadgets available. Left-click a gadget and select 'Show details' to see more information. To add a gadget to your collection, right-click it and choose Add. All the gadgets work with Windows 8, but some are not compatible with Windows 10. If you choose one that doesn't seem to work, try an alternative – most of the tools in the pack offer options that do similar things. If you have a number of gadgets but can't see a specific one on your gadget sidebar, it may have moved to the next page of the sidebar. Click the arrow 2 to switch to the next page and try to find it there.



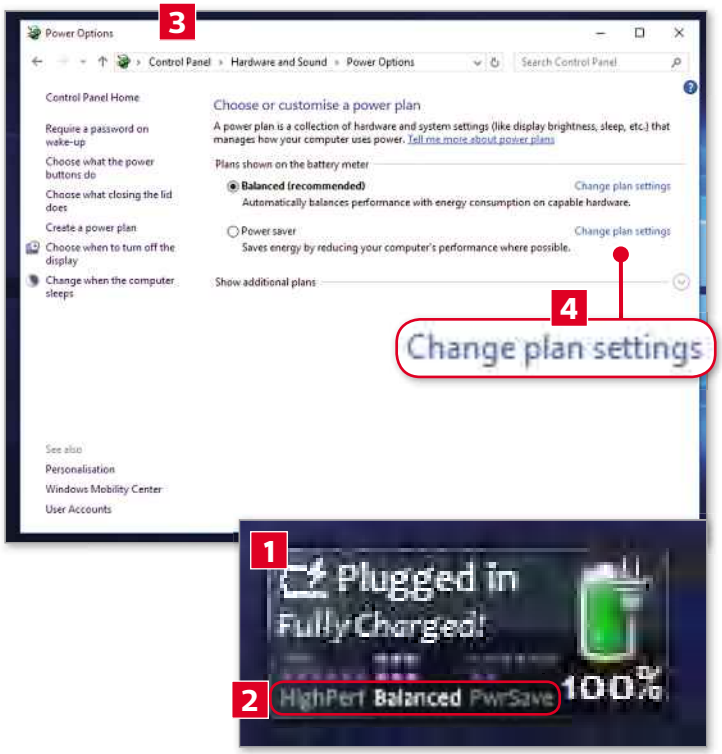
STEP 4 Right-click a gadget and select 8GadgetPack Tools 1. Here you'll find settings that, among other things, stop the gadgets running automatically on startup and let you enlarge your gadgets 2. Click the 'Disable sidebar' option 3 and all your running gadgets will appear on your Desktop. Click and hold the 'Drag gadget' icon 4 and move it to wherever you want on your Desktop. You can still arrange them in a column down the right if you want, or you can spread them around your Desktop, but unlike on the sidebar all your gadgets will be visible all the time.



STEP 5 Control System is a great little gadget that works like a mini Start menu on your Desktop. Click the Control group 1 to see shortcut icons for useful functions like shutdown. The Control Panel icon 2 is particularly handy on Windows 10 because Microsoft removed it from the default Start menu options. You can drag and drop shortcut icons to any section, and drag in your own shortcuts for quick access to tools you use all the time. Click Grp+ and Style 3 for more options.



STEP 6 It's a good idea to keep an eye on what's happening to your PC hardware as it can help you solve problems as soon as they appear. There is a range of gadgets that can help with this. For simple monitoring of your processor and memory, try CPU Meter 1. For more detailed info on your PC, try All CPU Monitor 2.



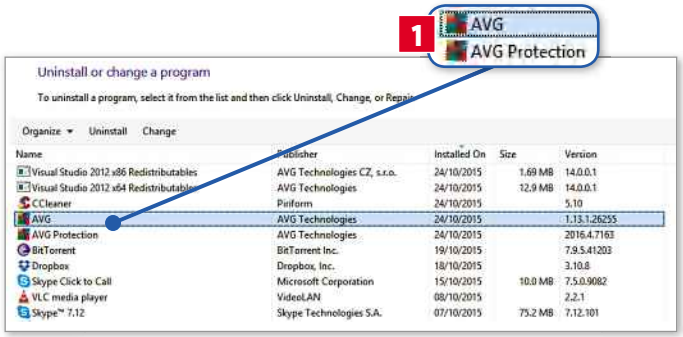
STEP 7 If you have a laptop, try Power Status 1. It provides an at-a-glance view of your battery status and shows you which of Windows' power plans you're currently using 2. To change a setting, simply click it. Double-click the gadget to open the Power Options window in the Control Panel 3. Click 'Change plan settings' 4 to change what each plan does.

Switch from AVG to Avast

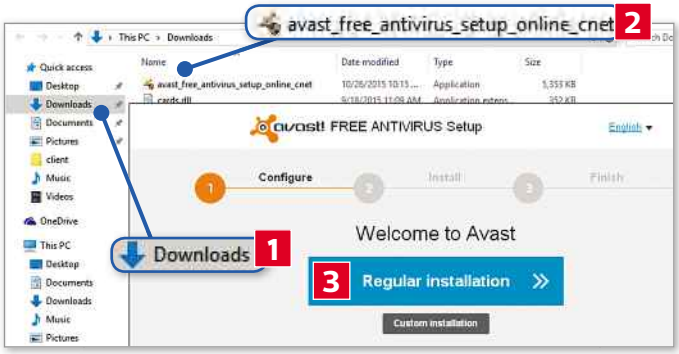
What you need: Avast Free Antivirus 2015; An Android device; Windows (XP to 10)
Time required: 30 minutes

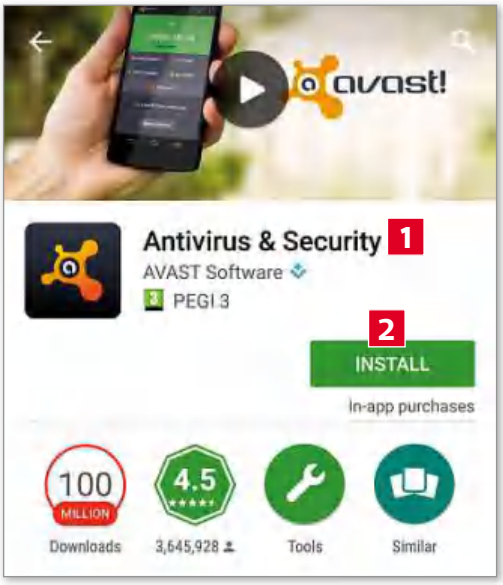
AVG's current policy is to sell 'non-personal data' of customers using its free antivirus (AV) programs to advertisers. This data includes details of your search history, browsing history, installed programs/apps, ISP and location. AVG's commercial partners will then use this to target you with relevant adverts. Therefore, if you use AVG's free antivirus, you should consider switching to Avast's free antivirus, which was the best performing free AV in our recent tests. Kaspersky Internet Security (paid-for) remains our top choice (see page 68 for our Reader Offer).

STEP 1 We'll first show you how to switch from AVG to Avast on a PC. Download Avast Free Antivirus 2015 by going to www.snipca.com/18476 and clicking the green Download Now button (beware of adverts that look similar). Before uninstalling AVG, close any programs connected to the internet because your PC will temporarily be unprotected while you switch. In Windows 10, type uninstall in the Start menu search bar and click 'Apps & features'. In earlier Windows versions, open Control Panel and click 'Uninstall a program' (under Programs). You'll see a list of installed programs, including AVG and AVG Protection 1.



STEP 2 Double-click AVG Protection, click Uninstall, 'Yes, Uninstall', then 'Delete Vault content'. This deletes any viruses that were saved to AVG's vault. Next, click Restart Now (this removes any leftover files). After restarting, open your Control Panel, double-click AVG, click Uninstall, then 'Yes, Uninstall'. Once that's uninstalled you need to install Avast. Go to your Downloads folder 1 and double-click the Avast setup file 2. Click Run, 'Regular installation' 3, then click Continue and wait for it to install (it can take up to 20 minutes). Finally, click Done to launch the program and begin a quick scan of your PC.





STEP 3 AVG doesn't yet offer an iOS app, but if you have an Android device it's easy to switch from AVG to Avast. Open the Play Store, tap the three lines at the top left, 'My apps', AVG Antivirus Free, then tap Uninstall. If you see Deactivate instead of Uninstall, it means you need to uninstall AVG direct from your device (rather than through the Play Store). To do that, open Settings on your device, tap Apps, AntiVirus, Uninstall, then OK. Now go to the Play Store, search for Avast's free Antivirus & Security app 1 and install it 2.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 25 Nov

- Master Windows 10's updated tools
- Stop anyone reading your Facebook posts
- Set how programs run on your PC
- Use Skype without installing software

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TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Take delayed screenshots in Windows 10

Even though there are many free programs you can use to take screenshots, I've always preferred using what I consider Windows' unsung hero – the Snipping Tool. After upgrading to Windows 10, I noticed that for the first time you can use this tool to set a time delay when taking screenshots.

This is particularly handy for taking screenshots of the Start menu. In previous versions of Windows, it was impossible to capture screenshots of the open menus using the Snipping Tool because it only let you take an instant shot of a static area on your screen. This meant that you could open a particular PC folder or webpage and screenshot the contents, for example, but you couldn't capture menus that required you to click to open them.

To use this delay option in Windows 10, type snipping tool in the bottom-left search bar and press Enter. Next, click the new Delay dropdown menu to see six options (0-5 secs). By default, its set to 0, meaning your screenshot is taken instantly. Change the time delay (see screenshot), then click New and navigate to the menus you want to capture.

After the time elapses, you'll see the Snipping Tool again. Now click the New dropdown menu, 'Rectangular snip', click and drag your cursor to select the screen area you want to capture, then click the floppy-disc icon to save this to your PC.

Gary Brady

The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

PDF SEARCH

Search for a word or phrase across multiple PDFs

I scan all my bills and save them as PDFs to a folder on my PC. However, I've always found it difficult to locate specific bills for reference purposes. Thankfully, I learned about a useful feature in Adobe Reader that lets you search for a word or phrase across numerous PDFs that are stored in the same location or folder on your PC.

To do this, open Adobe Reader, click the Edit tab, then Advanced Search. Now change the default search selection to 'All PDF Documents in' (see screenshot below). Next, click the dropdown menu, select 'Browse for Location', navigate to where your PDFs are stored, then click OK. Type the word or phrase you want to search for in the field below. The tick boxes below that let you further refine your searches. Click the Search button, then Allow and you'll immediately see your search results listed. This little tip has made my life much easier.

Brian Helmsley

PC-TO-TV CONNECTION

Fix audio problems when you connect your PC to your TV

My new Windows laptop has a DVD drive and an HDMI slot. This means I can now watch films on my TV's home-theatre system by simply connecting my PC to my TV using an HDMI cable. However, initially there was a problem when I connected the two. While video transferred perfectly well to my TV, audio was restricted to my PC. I first thought the HDMI cable might be faulty, but a friend of mine explained that this is actually a common problem with an easy fix.

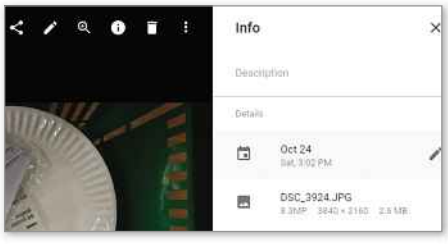
After connecting your PC and TV, open the Control Panel on your PC, click 'Hardware and Sound', then click Sound. Next, click the 'Digital Audio (HDMI)' option in the list, then click the Set Default button. Finally, click Apply, then OK and sound will immediately transfer from your PC to your TV.

Carl Foster

PHOTO STORAGE

Edit timestamps in Google Photos

Google Photos has quickly become my service of choice for syncing and storing my photos. However, one thing frustrated me: you couldn't change the date data of your photos. So, for example, if you saved a photo to Google Photos that someone sent you, it would be dated according to when it appeared in your account not when it was taken – and there was no way to change this.



Thankfully, Google have now fixed this. To change a photo's date information, go to photos.google.com, log into your Google account and open a photo. Click the 'i' (info) icon at the top right, then click the date option on the right (see screenshot above). Change the date and time the photo was taken, then click Save.

Colin Carwell

Phone and Tablet Tips

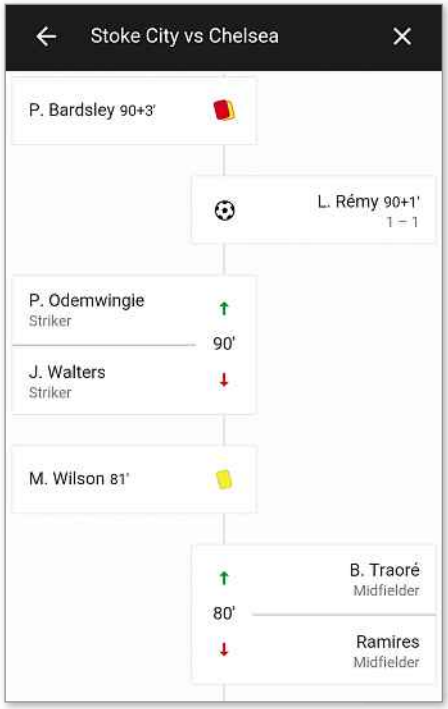
Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Follow live summaries of football matches

It's sometimes difficult finding the time – or the money – to watch your favourite football team's matches. While you could always keep track of your teams' scores using Google Now, the app has a new feature that lets you keep up with key moments of the match as they unfold.

First open Google Now and swipe down to refresh the app. Now scroll to find the match scoreline, then tap it. At the top, you'll see the goal scorers and two tabs – Lineups and Timeline. Tap the latter to see goals, attempts on target, player substitutions, and red and yellow cards on a timeline (see screenshot left).



iOS

Quickly attach a photo to any compatible app

Unlike with Android, you could never easily share photos on iOS with non-Apple apps (such as Outlook and Facebook). That's now changed with the release of iOS 9.

Open the Photos app and tap the photo you want to share. To share multiple photos, tap Select at the top right, then tap to select the ones you want. Now tap the Share icon (a rectangle with an arrow pointing upwards). You'll see two rows of icons – the bottom row contains actions, such as printing or creating a slideshow.

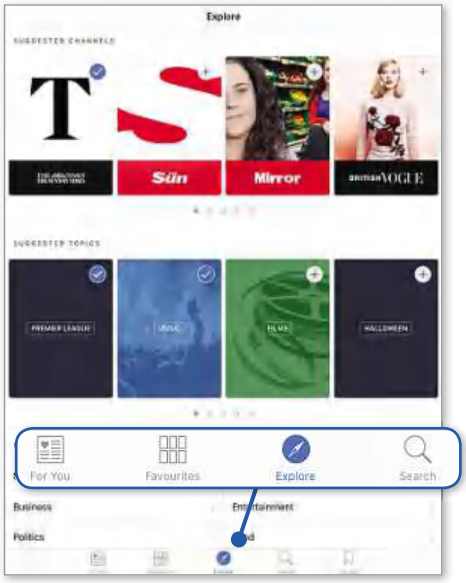
By default, the top row contains five icons. The first four let you attach your photos to Apple's default apps (including Mail and Message). To add other compatible apps to this row, tap the fifth icon – More. You'll see sliders beside all the compatible photo-sharing apps that you've installed (for example, Outlook, Facebook and Google Drive). Simply tap the sliders beside them to turn them on, then tap Done at the top. You'll now see that those apps' icons have been added to the top row.

iOS

Tailor Apple's News app to reflect your interests

The latest iOS update (9.1) included Apple's new News app. To get it, update your device by tapping Settings, General, then Software Update. Tap Update if there's one pending. On your homescreen, tap to open the News app (a red icon) to see a list of stories.

To customise the app's content to suit your interests, tap the Explore tab at the bottom. You'll see a list of suggested news sources (including *The Sunday Times* and *The Mirror* – see screenshot below) and topics (including Premier League football

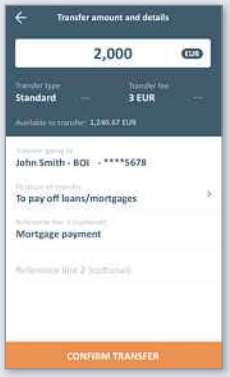


Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

Headspace – meditation
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/18489
iOS: www.snipca.com/18490
Developed by a UK monk who's helped celebrities learn the art of meditation, Headspace aims to teach you his methods for a happy and stress-free life. The 10 free lessons are a perfect way to get started, but you'll need to pay for additional sessions.

CurrencyFair Money Transfer
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/18491
iOS: www.snipca.com/18492
One of the most reliable money-transfer services on the web just got its own app. It lets you securely send money to 18 set destinations including Europe, United States, South Africa, Canada and Australia. You'll save up to 90 per cent on transfer fees compared to a bank.



Dropbox
Free
Window Phone: www.snipca.com/18488
The popular cloud-storage app has been updated with a new design and features, bringing it up to speed with its Android and iOS equivalents. You can now copy and paste files and folders, and files to be viewed offline. Photos and videos you've uploaded appear in a new 'Recents' section.

and Music) as tiles. Tap the '+' symbols on those you want to add to your news stream. At the bottom, you'll see more general sections, including News, Science, Business and Entertainment. Tap any of these to see more suggested channels and topics that you can also tap to add.

When you've finished customising, tap the For You tab at the bottom and your news feed will change to reflect the selections you've made. You can also save articles to a list, which is useful if you want to read it later. To do that, tap to open the article, then tap the bookmark icon at its top right. These articles can be accessed by tapping the Saved tab at the bottom.

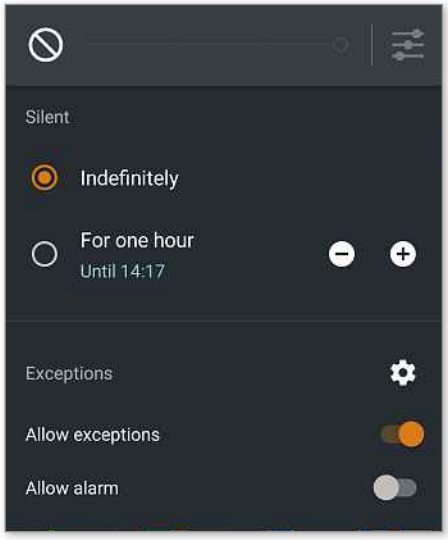
ANDROID

Receive calls in Silent mode

There's an easy way to accept calls even when your phone is in Silent mode. This is especially useful if you don't want to be harassed by endless app notifications, but are expecting an important call. The process involves creating an 'exception' that allows you to hear only callss.

First, set your phone to Silent mode by pressing the 'volume down' button on the side of your device. Next, tap the cog icon beside Exceptions, then the slider beside Calls. Press the 'volume down' button again, then tap the 'Allow exceptions' slider to turn it on (see screenshot below).

Bear in mind, this method won't work if you've updated your phone to the latest version of Android (6, Marshmallow). But unless you're using a Google Nexus device, chances are you won't receive this update until early next year.

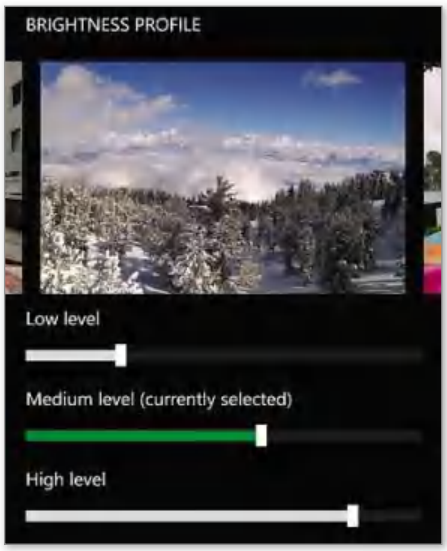


WINDOWS PHONE

Modify your brightness profiles

Android and iOS devices have a brightness slider, whereas Windows Phones have three manual brightness profiles – High, Low and Medium. To switch between these, swipe down from the top of your screen and keep tapping the Brightness tile at the top.

There's an easy way to change the intensity of these profiles. So, for example, you can make the High profile brighter and the Low profile darker. To do that, tap All Settings, scroll down to the 'extras' section, tap 'display', then tap the 'adjust' button below 'Brightness profile'. You'll see three sliders for each profile (see screenshot right). Move each slider to see the effect your change has on the photo above.



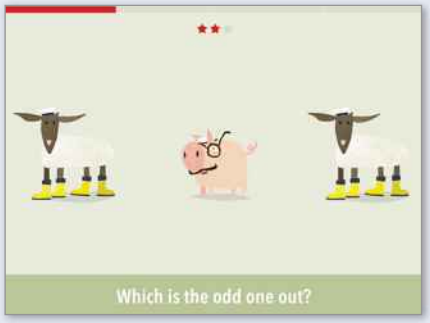
When you've finished, tap the Windows icon at the bottom to return to your homescreen.

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

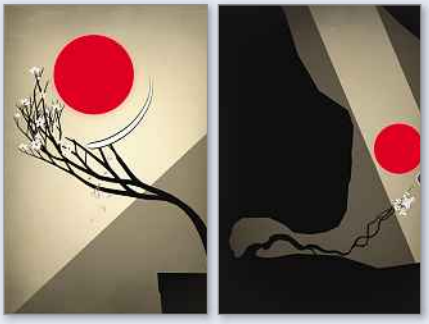
Fiete Choice

71p www.snipca.com/18493 (Android)
79p www.snipca.com/18494 (iOS)
In this award-winning game, your toddler will see a group of objects and needs to select the odd one out. They'll then hear the name of that item (or prompts if they select the wrong one). There are over 99 levels, and a time-trial option for when they've honed their skills.



Prune

£3.10 www.snipca.com/18495 (Android)
£2.99 www.snipca.com/18496 (iOS)
This beautifully designed game has a really simple concept but quickly becomes quite challenging. Swipe up to grow your plant, which quickly matures into a tree with ever-expanding branches. Your aim is to ensure most of the branches grow towards the sunlight. Simply swipe across to prune the ones that don't.



Guitar Hero Live

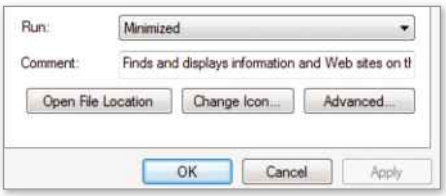
Free www.snipca.com/18497 (iOS)
Few of us have experienced the thrill of playing lead guitar in front of an audience, but the app version of this famous game lets you simulate the experience. Simply tap the notes on the moving guitar fretboard at the right time to win points. You get two free songs, but can buy more if you want.

WINDOWS XP, VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Start Windows programs in a minimised state

By default Windows programs open in full-screen mode, but you can set some to open in a minimised state instead. This means they'll launch on your PC, but will be constrained to the Taskbar until you click their icon to maximise them. It works in all Windows versions, but not with all programs. Those it does work with include Office and Internet Explorer.

To set a program to launch in a minimised state, right-click its icon on your Desktop and click Properties. Now set the Run dropdown menu to Minimized, click Apply, then OK (see screenshot below).



WINDOWS 7, 8, 10

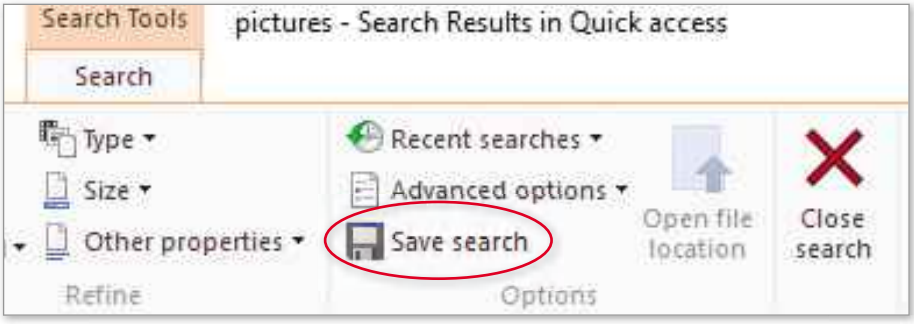
Save common search terms for easy access

If you regularly search your PC for particular terms, then you should save them – and the results they produce – in a common folder as options. It's easy to do this and it saves you having to type the search term each time. First, create a folder named 'Saved searches' on your Desktop (we'll save our search terms here).

In Windows 10, open Windows Explorer, type your search term in the top right, press Enter and wait for Windows to list all your search results. To save this search, click the Search tab on Windows Explorer, then click 'Save search' (see screenshot below). Now navigate to the 'Saved searches' folder on your Desktop and click Save.

In Windows 7 and 8, run your search as you normally would within Windows/File Explorer, wait for your search results to generate, then click the 'Save search' button at the top left and save it to the 'Saved searches' folder on your Desktop.

Open the folder to see all your saved search terms (as blue folders). Simply double-click them whenever you want to run that search again.



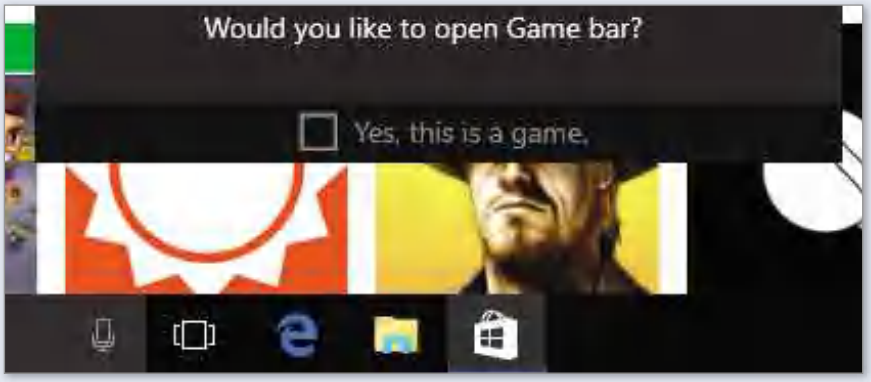
WINDOWS 10

Hack Windows to record your screen as a video

One of the best ways of describing a Windows 10 problem to a friend/technician is by sending them a recording of what you're doing on your screen. Windows 10 has its own screen-recording tool called 'Game bar'. Microsoft actually included this to let you record Xbox game footage on your PC, but it's easy to trick the tool into letting you capture whatever you do on screen as a video.

Activate it using a keyboard shortcut within any Desktop app. So, for example, click the Windows Store icon on your Taskbar to open that. Now press the Windows key+G. You'll see a message: 'Would you like to open Game bar' (see screenshot below). Tick the 'Yes, this is a game' box (to trick the tool into thinking you're recording gameplay footage). You'll now see a small panel at the bottom with four buttons.

Click the Record button to start recording. Now navigate to your PC's problem area. A timer at the top of your screen indicates your video length. Click the same button to stop recording. You can also use the keyboard shortcuts Windows key+Alt+R to start and stop recording. To watch your saved recordings, go to This PC, Videos, then Captures. Send them to whoever you want by email or by using a cloud-storage service, such as OneDrive or Dropbox.



WINDOWS XP, VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Access all your PC's settings from one place

Another Windows hack involves creating a secret folder called 'GodMode', which lets you access all your PC's settings from one place. These are divided into neat sections, including Action Center, Display, Default Programs and AutoPlay.

To create the folder, right-click any blank area on your Desktop, move your cursor to New, then click Folder. Name the folder GodMode.{ED7BA470-8E54-465E-825C-99712043E01C}. If you don't want to call it GodMode, replace the text before the full stop with something else, such as 'All Settings' or 'Easy Access'. Press Enter to create the folder. It'll change to a Control Panel icon, giving you access to all your PC's settings.

Make Office Better

Expert tips for every program

OFFICE

Upgrade from Office 2013 to Office 2016 for free

If you're using Office 2013 with an Office 365 subscription, then you can upgrade to Microsoft's latest version of Office (2016) for free in just a few steps.

If not, you should check whether your PC comes with a free Office 365 subscription for one month (applies only to new PCs). To find out if you're eligible, simply open any Office program, click File at the top left, then click Account and look for the Product Information section on the right. If you see Microsoft Office 365 under Subscription Product, it means you can upgrade to Office 2016 for a free trial period.

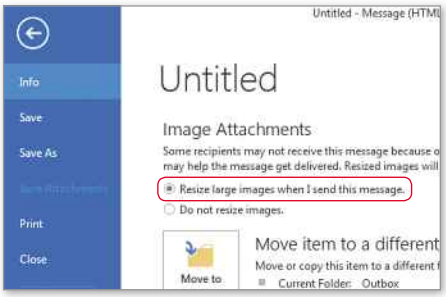
To do that, go to Microsoft's Office website (www.snipca.com/18388), click the 'Sign in' dropdown menu at the top right, then click 'For home' and log in with your Microsoft account. Next, click the orange Install button below 'New: Office 2016 is now available' (see screenshot). Now click the Install button again on the following page to download the setup file, then run it to install and upgrade your version of Office 2013 to Office 2016.

• Read our review of Office 2016 in Issue 460 (page 20).

OUTLOOK

Shrink large files to email without problems

It can be frustrating when you try to email large files and photos. If you're sending photos taken with a DSLR camera, for example, the files are likely to be a couple of MBs each. Large attachments like these can take a while to send. Very hefty files may simply be bounced back to you, especially if your recipient's email account is running low on storage space.



It's often recommended to transfer these files using a cloud-storage service, such as OneDrive, Google Drive or Dropbox. But if you don't use cloud storage and don't mind compromising photo quality for speed, then Outlook has a setting that lets you shrink your images before sending them. To do this, open a new email and attach your oversize files. Now click File at the top left of your message window, then select 'Resize large images when I send this message' (see screenshot above). Click the top-left back button to return to your message, then send it. We sent some large photo files to colleagues using this method and they reported back that the loss in photo quality was barely discernible.

EXCEL

Create an address book in seconds

Excel offers a range of free templates that can help you quickly create spreadsheets for basic everyday data (such as an address book or a monthly expenses sheet). You can use the template as it is or change its column headers to suit your requirements. In this example, we'll show you how to customise a template to create a basic address book.

Open Excel, then click Address Book in the template tabs at the top. We'll use the orange Address Book template (one of the first options). Select this, then click the Create button to open the spreadsheet. Here you'll see columns for Name, Work, Home, Email, Birthday and so on.

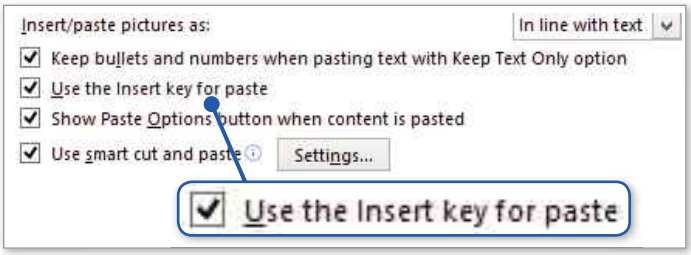
To delete a column, right-click its column header cell, then click Delete. Delete the (dummy) data from the first two rows and enter your data. The dropdown menus beside the column headers let you sort its values however you want (alphabetically, numerically, and so on).

WORD

Use keyboard shortcuts to move and copy text quickly

We all use the universal keyboard shortcuts for Cut (Ctrl+X), Copy (Ctrl+C) and Paste (Ctrl+V), but Word has additional keyboard shortcuts that can make life even easier. For example, if you want to move text quickly, select the text and press F2 on your keyboard. Next, click the location within your document where you want to paste this, and press Enter. If you want to copy text (rather than move it), then press Shift+F2 after selecting it.

You can also use the Insert key to paste any copied text. While the F2 keyboard shortcut works in Word by default, you need to activate the Insert key shortcut. To do that, click File at the top left, Options, Advanced and scroll to the 'Cut, copy, and paste' section. Now tick the 'Use the Insert key for paste' box (see screenshot below), click OK and close the Word Options window.



LibreOffice 5

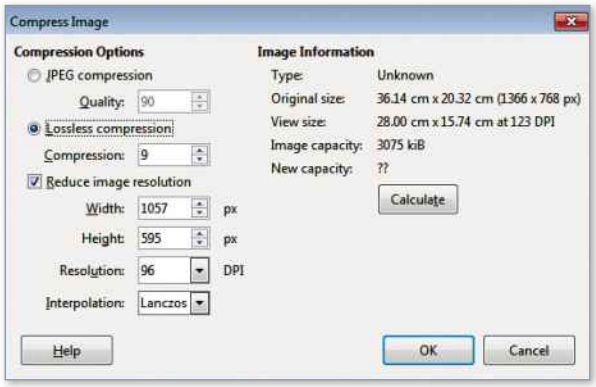
Make special selections, compress documents to save space and get updates first

Extend your selections

Writer and Calc have some nifty hidden tricks for selecting text. Click and drag as normal to select, then try right-clicking on the tiny box/text-cursor icon in the status bar (at the bottom of the program window, towards the centre). Choose 'Adding selection', for example, and you'll be able to select multiple unconnected passages of text or cells: simply hold down the Control (Ctrl) key while making your selections, then press Ctrl+C to copy them all at once. Also, use the 'Extending selection' option to enlarge an existing selection, or 'Block selection' to draw a box around stuff you want to select.

Add up the way you want

Calc's status bar displays an instant tally of the values contained in selected cells – but did you know you can tweak this handy totaliser to show something other than the sum total? Right-click where it says 'Sum=' then choose a different calculation. Average, for example, determines the average of the selected values, while Maximum picks out the highest value.



Reduce LibreOffice file sizes by compressing images, with no quality loss

Change capitalisation quickly

Sometimes it's useful to quickly change the case of your text, from lower- to upper case to create a headline, say. In Writer and Calc you can do this with the keyboard shortcut Shift+F3: simply press this repeatedly to cycle through the different style options. In other LibreOffice programs this shortcut brings up various dialogue boxes, but you'll find the same options on the Format menu – within the Change Case sub-menu.

Add features with extensions

Familiar with those extensions that add extra features to your web browser? Well, LibreOffice can be improved in exactly the same way. Visit http://extensions.openoffice.org to see your options. Installation is as simple as double-clicking the downloaded extensions (files with an OXT extension) and following the prompts. There are loads to try but we'd definitely recommend checking out Read Text (www.snipca.com/18019). This puts a speech-bubble icon in most LibreOffice apps – just click this and the program will read aloud any selected text.

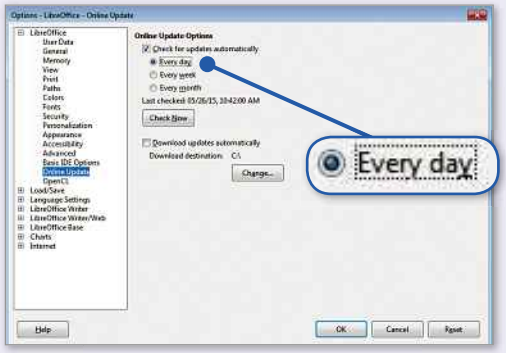
Compress images for smaller files

Documents, spreadsheets and presentations with lots of images can result in large files sizes, making them difficult to share via email and taking up valuable hard-drive space. You can make life easier with a little-known feature that compresses images – but doesn't necessarily result in lost quality. Select an image then open the Format menu, move your cursor to Image and choose Compress Image. JPEG compression offers the biggest space-savings but if you want to retain full quality, choose the 'Lossless compression' button, set the Compression value to 9 (that's the maximum), then click OK (see screenshot above).

Embed fonts to preserve your layouts

If you share your LibreOffice documents with others then embedding fonts will ensure your layouts are preserved, because all the fonts used will be saved along with the file. If the recipient doesn't have all the necessary fonts installed on their computer, LibreOffice will automatically draw on its embedded data. To do this in any LibreOffice tool, click File followed by Properties, then choose the Font tab and tick the 'Embed fonts in this document' box.

Get the latest updates before everyone else



You may already be aware that if you want the latest LibreOffice features you should download and install Fresh, as this gives you the latest 'major' version with the newest features. The Still edition is older, but potentially more reliable.

That said, the Fresh install has a hidden way to ensure you're at the front of the queue when it comes to any updates. In any LibreOffice program open the Tools menu and choose Options. Now double-click the LibreOffice category in the left-hand pane to expand it, then select Online Update.

The default here is 'Every week', so to get the latest updates quicker select 'Every day' (see screenshot) and make sure that 'Check for updates automatically' is ticked. If you're even more impatient, visit this dialogue box any time to click Check Now.

Li-Fi

You may soon be able to go online with a flick of your light switch

What is it?

A way of transmitting data using the light emitted from LED lightbulbs. Supporters of the technology say it has several key qualities that will make it a viable alternative to Wi-Fi.

What are they?

First, it's much faster. UK researchers say they've hit 10Gbps. Second, unlike Wi-Fi, you can use multiple Li-Fi devices in a room without them interfering with each other. Third, Wi-Fi is more expensive to run, and requires huge resources of energy to cool the base stations connected to masts. Li-Fi can also be used in places where Wi-Fi is a security risk, such as aircraft cabins, hospitals and nuclear power plants.

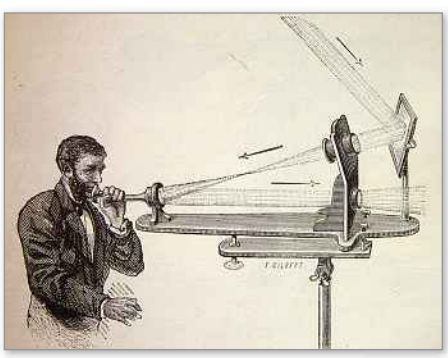
But its biggest advantage is that the Li-Fi spectrum, comprising visible light, is 10,000 times wider than Wi-Fi's, which uses radio and microwaves.

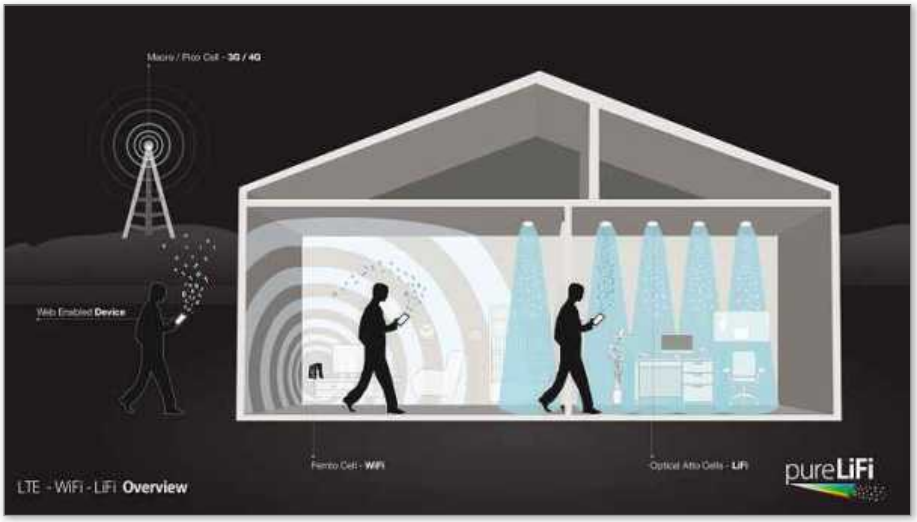
Why is that important?

Because we're heading for Wi-Fi gridlock. By 2019, experts predict that more than 10 billion devices will need Wi-Fi, and there isn't enough spectrum to cope with that kind of overload. Li-Fi could boost capacity so we can all continue using the devices we now take for granted.

Can I use my existing lightbulbs?

Afraid not. Li-Fi works only with bulbs that have a special chip inside. This varies the intensity of the light in order to convert it into binary data (zeros and ones), which is picked up by a light sensor on the web-enabled device.





Won't that give me a headache?

No, because the changes in brightness are imperceptible to the human eye, so there's no annoying flicker. You do need to keep the lightbulbs switched on, but they can be dimmed so they are barely visible.

Is anyone using Li-Fi yet?

Yes. Nasa is planning to see how well the technology works on board the International Space Station. It's been suggested that Li-Fi could be used on future manned trips to Mars.

Commercial enterprises are also experimenting with the technology, aware there's big money to be made. Disney, for example, is working on a 'Linux Light Bulb' that lets toys 'talk' to each other. One of the leading manufacturers is the Edinburgh-based firm PureLifi (http://purelifi.com), which produced the above illustration to show how the technology works. It may look like the man with the tablet is stepping into a room full of showers, but those are shafts of light, each transmitting data.

If it's so good, why aren't we all using it?

Because it's only recently been shown to work. Step forward Harald Haas, a professor at Edinburgh University and co-founder of PureLifi, who first demonstrated it at a conference in 2011 (watch his speech and read the transcript at www.snipca.com/18269). Haas even coined the term Li-Fi, saying it stands for 'Light Fidelity'.

Haas imagines a world where cars use Li-Fi to prevent accidents and every street light provides internet access. He thinks that by 2040 Li-Fi "will serve thousands of applications and will be an integral part of the emerging smart cities, smart homes and the internet of things".

Does it have any drawbacks?

Yes, the biggest being that it can't penetrate walls. But that wouldn't be a problem if every room in your house had a Li-Fi-powered lightbulb.

How long has it been around?

Longer than you may think. It's a form of optical wireless communication, in which light is used to carry a signal. Nasa says this phenomenon was first detected by Alexander Graham Bell in the 1880s. He transmitted speech using changes in sunlight over a distance of several hundred yards. This led to his photophone (Wikipedia page: www.snipca.com/18279 – see image left), which used the same principles as fibre-optic internet did over 100 years later. Clever chap, that Mr Bell.

Make Your PC LIVE MUCH LONGER

What's really going on inside your PC? Jonathan Parkyn reveals how to scan your computer's components to diagnose and fix your PC's health

TURN TO PAGE 73 FOR OUR JARGON BUSTER

When we talk about fixing PC problems or extending its lifespan, the focus is often on software – removing junk files, uninstalling programs or using tools to clean up and speed up your computer. But that's only half the story. The health of your computer's hardware is just as fundamental to its smooth running and longevity. Physical hardware failures can make your PC behave erratically, slow it down or even stop it working altogether. If you check now that your PC's components are fit and well, you can help your PC work well and run fast for years to come.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Uncover essential information about your PC's hardware
- Check that all your computer's components are working properly
- Find out why your PC is running so slowly
- Test your SSD
- Get external drive specifications
- Check your keyboard and display

Component confusion

Unless you're an IT expert, you may not know a great deal about your PC's internal components and how they work. What type of processor does it have, for example? Is it running efficiently or is it on the brink of failing? How much memory is installed, and is it all working properly? What about your hard drive – is it performing to the best of its abilities and, if not, is there anything you can do about it?

But you don't need to be a boffin to take care of your computer's components. In this guide we're going to explain how to lift the lid on your PC and find out exactly what it's made of. We'll show you how to check the status of all your computer's hardware and explain what to do if you discover a problem.

CHECK YOUR PC's PROCESSOR AND MEMORY

How does a processor work?

We often think of the processor (sometimes referred to as 'CPU') as the brain of a computer – in fact, that's the exact phrase we use in our own Jargon Buster (page 73). What it actually does is process data, performing calculations to interpret everything from a simple mouse click to a complicated set of instructions from a program or an operating system (OS).

The speed at which it is able to do this is governed by a number of factors, chief among which is its clock speed, measured in GHz. The number of cores, the processor type and whether your PC is a 32bit or 64bit system can also play a role, as can the health and capabilities of other hardware, such as memory and cooling systems.

Use CPU-Z to find out your processor speed

Lift the lid on your processor

You can open your PC's built-in Device Manager (click Start, then right-click Computer or File Explorer and select Manage) for a list of your computer's hardware components, including the processor. But, as it stands, Windows itself provides precious little information about the individual components that make up your PC. For more insight, you'll need to download and install some free tools.

To get started, download the latest version of free tool Belarc Advisor (www.snipca.com/18328). After installing and launching it, click Yes when prompted to analyse your computer. It'll then gather all the information it needs and present its findings in a browser window. Don't worry – no private details about your PC are uploaded to the web.

Belarc Advisor provides a detailed profile of all your PC's hardware and software – it's worth printing a copy and keeping it handy for future reference.

There's plenty of interesting information in the section headed 'Processor'. If it says '64bit ready' (see screenshot right), that means you can install a 64bit OS should you wish – you'll see the benefit when using programs and apps that support 64bit systems.

Belarc will also tell you if your processor is multi-core and, if so, how many cores are present. Other useful information here relates to the size of the processor's memory cache and whether or not it supports hyper-threading (a technology that allows a processor to carry out multiple tasks simultaneously).

Bench-test your processor

Another of our favourite free tools for "seeing inside" your PC is CPU-Z (www.snipca.com/18351). Like Belarc, it's easy to install and there's no added junk to worry about.

When you run CPU-Z, you'll see a small tabbed window full of technical information (see screenshot above). On the CPU tab, which is open by default, you can find out your processor's type and clock speed. As you can see from the screenshot, ours is Intel Core2 Duo, with a speed of 2.53GHz. Make a note of the processor's full name, code name and socket type (listed under Package) – these details can be very helpful if you need to research a potential problem online.

To save or print a copy of CPU-Z's details for reference, click Tools, then 'Save Report as .TXT'. In the latest version of the tool, you can also click the Bench tab, then click Bench CPU to get a performance score for your processor. The scores are pretty meaningless on their own, but you can select another processor model from the Reference dropdown menu to compare scores, or run a web search to see what scores other users of the same processor are logging.

Find out if your PC's processor can support a 64bit OS with free tool Belarc Advisor

Find out how well your processor is performing

Windows has some built-in tools for showing how hard your processor is working and how well it's coping. Right-click the Taskbar and select Task Manager, then click 'More details' if shown. Click the Performance tab for a graph displaying various real-time details about your system status. The CPU graph, for example, will tell you how hard your PC's processor is having to work. You can expect a few spikes as processes do their thing in the background. Try launching a program, for example. You should notice an increase in CPU usage. There's no 'normal' usage – what you see here will depend on lots of factors, such as the type and speed of your processor, as well as what background activities are currently running. However, if your processor is regularly clocking 75-100 per cent during idle times, that could be a sign that there's a problem.

For more details about system performance, click the Resource Monitor option at the bottom of the Task Manager window, then click the CPU tab of the window that opens. This will display graphical information about the usage of individual processor cores (if you have a multi-core system) and show real-time data about what processes and services are currently using up the most processing power.

Windows can also produce a useful PC health report. Press the Win+R, type

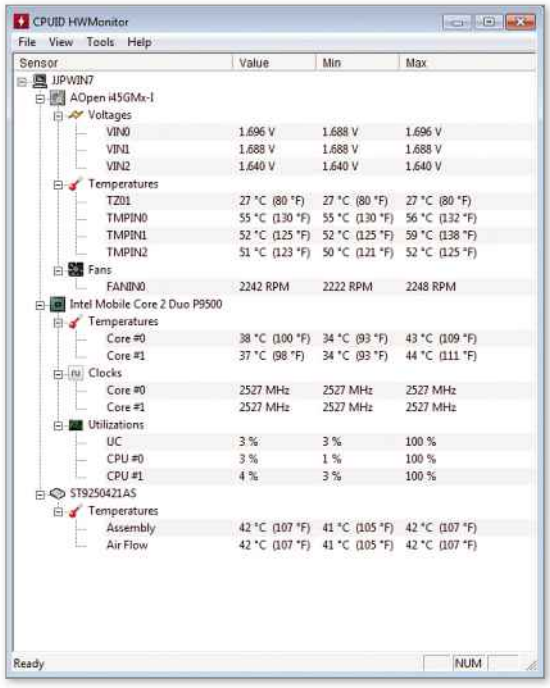
perfmon /report and press Enter. This will take a snapshot of your computer's performance, then generate a diagnostic report based on its findings. You can view a summary of its analysis under Basic Checks. You don't need to worry about a green result, but red ones may need your urgent attention. Below you'll find more details in individual categories.

Predictably, a lot of these list reams of unintelligible techno-twaddle, but click Performance for a general idea of how well your processor, memory and hard drive are performing – again, green is good. Click File, then Save As to save a copy of your report. If you need to contact your manufacturer or a support team at any point, you can email this report to them to help diagnose a problem.

Take your processor's temperature

What Windows doesn't do very well is provide you with any information about your computer's operating temperature. Processors can get pretty hot. This is normal, but if your processor overheats, your PC can start to behave erratically or even suffer permanent damage, which is why your PC has a cooling system – fans, heatsinks, vents and so on – to keep temperatures down. All computers contain internal sensors that monitor various temperatures; you just need a tool that can tell you what they're reading. One such tool is HWMonitor, free from the makers of CPU-Z (www.snipca.com/18352).

Install and run the tool. The main page (see screenshot below) displays information about the temperature of various components, as well as voltages, fan speeds and more. The Value column updates in real time. The Min and Max columns display the minimum and maximum values over the course of the period the tool has been running for.



Is your processor too hot? Run HWMonitor to find out its temperature

Annoyingly, the application does little more than report its findings – it won't warn you if it detects that a component is overheating. Instead you'll need to do a little detective work of your own by searching online for your processor's model number (as shown in CPU-Z). The website www.cpu-world.com, for example, lists minimum and maximum temperatures for hundreds of different processors. In general, if your processor is operating at anything between 30-50°C, it's working normally. Anything over 60°C could be a cause for concern.

Check your PC's memory usage

RAM (Random Access Memory) is your PC's temporary storage space – it's where all open files and running programs are held while your PC is switched on. Your processor will access data directly from the PC's memory as required, so your RAM needs to be operating to the best of its ability. Many of the tools we've already mentioned can be used to monitor the health of other components, including your PC's memory.

Windows Task Manager can give you an idea of how much memory is being used by your system at any time. Look at the Memory section of the Performance tab for a graph showing the percentage of your PC's installed RAM that's currently in use. The more programs and files you have open, the more memory will be used. Once all available memory has been used, your PC will automatically switch to using virtual memory – a portion of your hard drive dedicated to behaving like memory only when needed – and this will make it run much slower. For more details about RAM usage, check the Memory tab of Windows Resource Monitor – here you'll find a useful per-megabyte breakdown of how your system's physical memory is being used and how much is still free.

Perform a thorough scan for memory faults using the Memory Diagnostics Tool's Extended option

Run a memory diagnostic scan

Faulty memory can cause crashes and glitches, but there's an easy way to check for these using Windows' built-in Memory Diagnostics Tool. Click Start, type memory, then click the Windows Memory Diagnostic option shown. Next, click 'Restart now and check for problems'. Your PC will reboot to the Memory Diagnostics screen (see screenshot above). You can let the tool run automatically or, for a more thorough scan, press F1 as soon as the screen appears. Use your cursor keys to select the Extended option and press F10 to apply and run the test. Should any errors be discovered, you'll see a notification when Windows starts.

If Task Manager and Resource Monitor show that your memory usage is regularly nudging 90 per cent or more, or if the Memory Diagnostics Tool keeps finding faults, then it may be time to consider adding more RAM or replacing faulty modules. You can find out how much you currently have installed, and which RAM slots are currently in use, from Belarc Advisor.

To find out what type of modules your PC uses, head to uk.crucial.com and click 'scan your system'. Download and run this free tool to examine your system – a web page will show what type of memory modules you have installed, how much you have and how much more you can install. It will list modules compatible with your PC, but don't feel obliged to buy memory from Crucial's store.

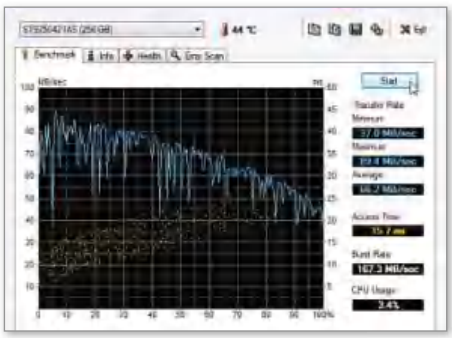
LIFT THE LID ON YOUR HARD DRIVE

Check your hard drive for errors

Newer versions of Windows are configured to check your hard drive for errors and fragmentation automatically, but you should also check them yourself from time to time. Click Start, then Computer (Windows 7) or right-click Start, then File Explorer, then This PC (Windows 8.1 and 10). Right-click a drive and select Properties. In the window that opens, click the Tools tab. Here you can click Check, then 'Scan drive' (Windows 8.1 and 10) or click 'Check now' and tick the box 'Scan for and attempt recovery of bad sectors', then click Start (Windows 7) to check your drive for errors and fix them.

Alternatively, click 'Optimise and defragment drive' (Windows 8.1 and 10) or Defragmentation (Windows 7) to open Windows' drive-optimisation tool. Here you can check the fragmentation status of all your drives. Click a specific drive in the list, then click Analyse to see how badly fragmented the data is. If necessary, click Optimise (Windows 10) or 'Defragment disk' (Windows 7) to fix the problem.

Windows has built-in tools to check your hard drive for errors and fragmentation



Run a benchmark test on your hard drive with HD Tune

Check your SMART status

Windows only goes so far in terms of providing details about your hard drive and its status. Belarc Advisor can give you a little more info – check under Drives in the report and you'll find your hard drives (and CD/DVD drive) listed, along with their model number, capacity and free space. And, if your drive is partitioned, you'll be able to see details of this under Local Drive Volumes. There's one other useful nugget of information found under Drives, though: its SMART status.

SMART stands for Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology. It comes built into all hard drives and SSDs and provides a quick way to see whether a drive is healthy or not. See box below for more on SSDs.

Annoyingly, Windows doesn't have a simple built-in way to check the SMART status of your drive. And even Belarc Advisor's details are slim. Luckily, there are better dedicated tools available for free. One that's worth getting hold of is CrystalDiskInfo. Head to www.snipca.com/18389 and download the Standard Edition of the tool – we recommend getting the one listed as 'Portable w/o Ads'. The portable version can be run without the need to install anything. Just unzip the downloaded file and double click DiskInfo.exe (or DiskInfoX64.exe if you're system is 64bit).

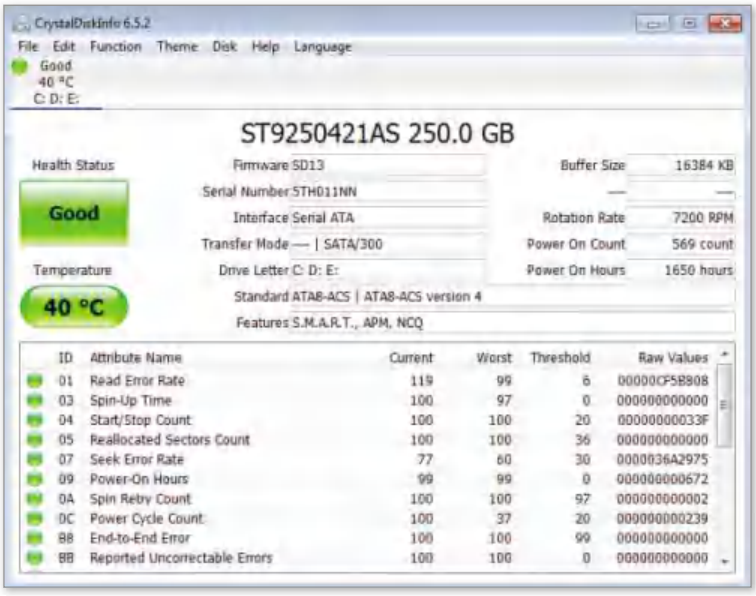
CrystalDiskInfo provides you with an overview of your drive's health status and its temperature – overheating can be a problem here too. You also get a lot of detail about the drive's specifications on the right-hand side, including its serial number and the firmware version it's running. Below, you'll find details on individual SMART attributes, such as its read-error rate and spin-up time. Again, don't worry about wrapping your head around all the technicalities – CrystalDiskInfo will let you know if it spots anything wrong. It can be useful to save a snapshot of the tool's findings, especially if you're seeking help from a tech support representative or online forum. Click Edit, then Copy and open a blank document in a word processor – Word or WordPad, for example – then press Ctrl+V to paste the data into your document and save it.

Another useful hard-drive tool is HD Tune. Get the free version from www.snipca.com/18390. It lets you bench-test your drive to get an idea of its performance – click Start on the Benchmark tab. On the Info tab you can see which features your drive supports. SMART data is listed on the Health tab and you can run a check for damaged blocks on the Error Scan tab. ▶

CHECK YOUR SSD

SSDs (solid state drives) don't need to be defragmented, but things can still go wrong. CrystalDiskInfo and HD Tune can both check your SSD's SMART status, temperature and performance. Also use the free portable version of SSD Life to get an inside on the drive's health (www.snipca.com/18392).

Though faster than normal drives, SSDs have one weakness: longevity. You can only write to SSDs a finite number of times. SSD Life can examine your drive and give you an estimated lifespan and overall health score. It can also tell you if Trim – a technology for managing and protecting SSDs – is enabled.



Use CrystalDisk Info for a detailed insight into your hard drive's health

LIFT THE LID ON YOUR PC's PERIPHERALS

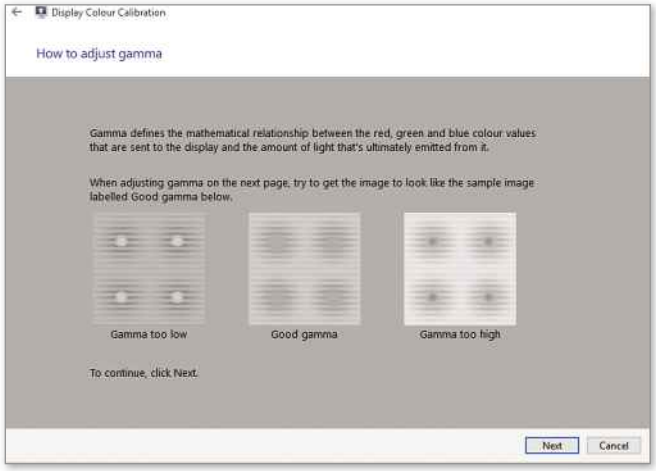
Check your display calibration

Whether you use a laptop or a desktop PC, screens can get pretty dirty – particularly ones with touch controls. If your display is suffering from a major health problem, you'll probably be able to see evidence right away – the colours may look wrong or your display may show nothing at all. The most common cause of display problems is loose cables, so check that everything's connected properly before you assume the worst.

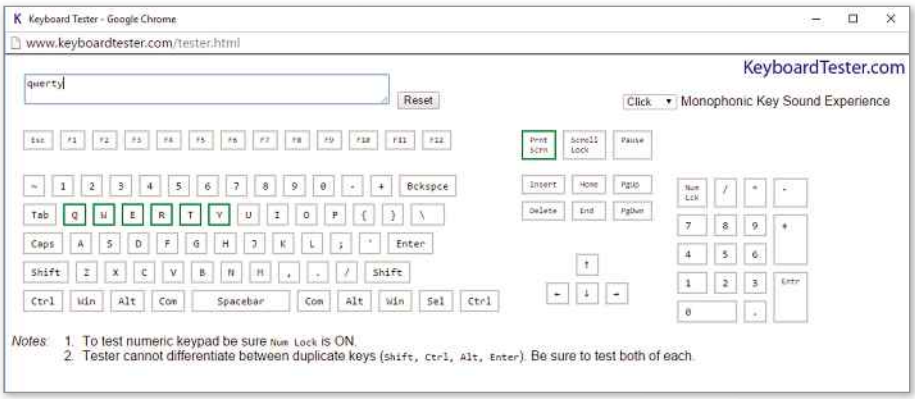
Even if you're not experiencing any obvious problems with your display, it's worth checking your screen's calibration. Windows has a built-in tool for this. Click Start, type calibrate, then click the 'Calibrate display colour' option that appears. Follow the on-screen prompts to make sure the screen is set up properly.

Older PC screens used to suffer from all kinds of health problems, including burn-in and flickering. Modern LCD screens are more robust, but one common problem is dead or stuck pixels. These are dots on the screen that no longer work properly. They're often quite hard to spot, as they're small and may only have trouble displaying a particular colour. There's a brilliant free online test for dead pixels at www.snipca.com/18393. You don't need to download anything – just click each of the options listed under Normal or Without JavaScript (depending which works best for you), then press F11 to switch to full screen. Check your screen closely for dead pixels, then press the 'Bckspce' key (below F2) to go back to the menu to try the next test on the list. Exit full-screen mode when you've finished by pressing F11 again.

You could also try going to www.snipca.com/18394 and clicking each of the colours listed. Your screen should automatically switch to full-screen mode in each case. Press 'Bckspce' and try each one in turn. If you find any dead pixels you may be able to revive them by clicking Fix My Screen – the flickering pattern will attempt to 'massage' the pixel back to life. But if there's an underlying hardware problem, this may not work.



Use Windows' calibration tool to make sure your display is set up correctly



Run a test to find out whether or not your keyboard's keys are working

Test your keyboard

Keys that refuse to work or a mouse pointer that gets stuck as you try to move it around the screen can be infuriating. For starters, you can use a free online tool to test that all your keys are working properly. Go to www.keyboardtester.com and click 'Launch the Tester'. A window will open with a diagram of a keyboard layout. Now press each key in turn to see if it's registered by the tool.

Clean your keyboard by turning it upside down over some kitchen roll and giving it a good shake. Use a can of compressed air to blow out muck from between the keys, then clean with an antibacterial wipe.

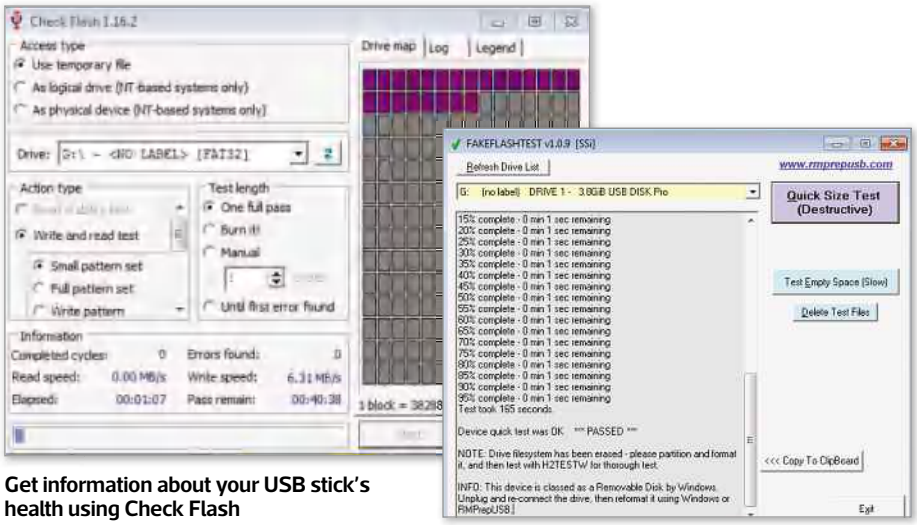
Check external drives and USB sticks

The health of external hard drives can be tested using many of the same tools used for internal ones (see page 53). In CrystalDiskInfo, you can select an external drive from the Disk menu. In HD Tune, select the drive you want to test from the main dropdown menu.

USB sticks ('flash drives') and SD and CF memory cards are a different proposition. You don't need to check these for fragmentation, for example, but you can test a USB stick's status and performance levels using a dedicated tool, such as Check Flash (free from www.snipca.com/18397). Download and unzip the file, then, with the USB stick you want to test plugged into your PC, run the ChkFlsh program. Select your stick from the dropdown menu, leave the other settings as they are then click Start. Once the test is complete, you'll see a summary of the drive's read and write speeds below, along with a drive map on the right, which will display any physical or data errors found – check the Legend tab to see what the

MONITOR YOUR LAPTOP'S BATTERY

Laptop owners have an extra hardware component to check – the battery. Like all components, battery performance can decline for a variety of reasons, including age, usage and temperature. Batteries are often expensive to replace, too, so it's a good idea to try to keep an eye on its health. A useful tool to have in your arsenal is NirSoft's BatteryInfoView (free from www.snipca.com/18363), which can monitor and log your battery's status over time, as well as provide useful details about the name, manufacturer and serial number. On the main screen, pay particular attention to the Battery Wear Level – this is the difference between the designed capacity and the actual capacity when fully charged. A new battery should show 100 per cent here, but this will inevitably decline over time.



Get information about your USB stick's health using Check Flash

Could your USB flash drive be a fake? Test it to find out

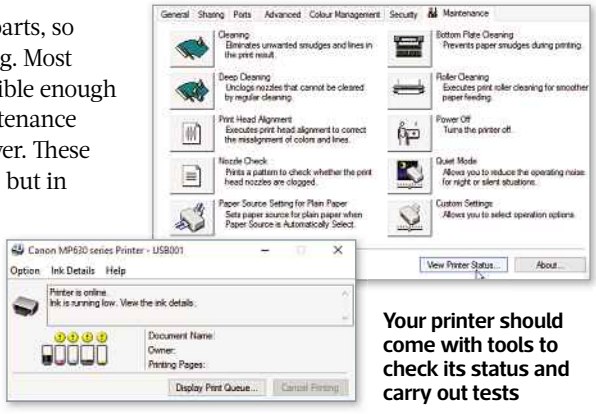
colour coding means.

Fake USB sticks and SD cards are a big problem. They might look like the real thing, but don't feature the full capacity advertised and can even corrupt your files. Luckily, there's a free tool that can quickly establish whether or not a drive is as large as it claims to be. Go to www.snipca.com/18398 and scroll down to FakeFlashTest. Download version 1.0.9 and unzip the file. Run the tool and select your drive from the dropdown menu. The test will wipe the entire contents of your drive, so make sure you've copied everything off it before clicking Quick Size Test. After you get your result, you'll need to reformat the drive. Right-click it in an Explorer window and select Format, then Start.

Check your printer

Printers have a lot of working parts, so there's plenty that can go wrong. Most printer manufacturers are sensible enough to include diagnostic and maintenance tools as part of the device's driver. These will vary from device to device, but in most cases you can get to the tools you need by clicking Start, typing printers and clicking the 'Devices and Printers' link that appears. Scroll down to your printer, then right-click it and select Printer Properties. This will open a tabbed window of settings and options.

On the General tab, you can click Print Test Page to get an instant idea of how well (or badly) your printer is performing. Most printer drivers will offer a Maintenance (or similar) tab here with further ways to check your device's health. In the case of our Canon MP630, for example (see screenshot below), there are options to check and clean nozzles, re-align print heads and more. Clicking View Printer Status allows you to see how full the ink cartridges are. Other printers and manufacturers may work in a slightly different way, but should provide you with similar tools and information.

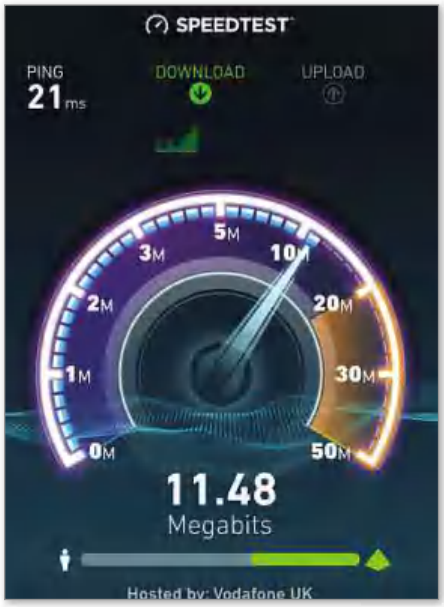


Your printer should come with tools to check its status and carry out tests

Check your router

Different routers use different systems, but green (or blue) lights are usually good, while amber or red lights mean that something needs your attention.

Further details about your router's status can be uncovered by visiting its configuration utility. In most cases, accessing this involves entering a specific name or IP address into a web browser and then logging in with an admin username and password – check the instructions that came with your device. There should be a status section, where you can view all the devices currently connected to your network, along with the status of the internet and wireless connections.



Use the free app Speedtest to check your router's Wi-Fi and broadband speeds

Your tablet and phone can help you test the strength and speed of your router's Wi-Fi or broadband. Download the free app WiFi SweetSpots (Android www.snipca.com/18400, iOS www.snipca.com/18401), position yourself where you want to test your Wi-Fi, then tap Start. To check broadband download and upload speeds, get the free Speedtest.net app (Android www.snipca.com/18402, iOS www.snipca.com/18403), then stand near your router and tap Begin Test. ca

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Bring back tools

Windows 10 dumped

Love Windows 10 but hate that it killed your favourite bits of Windows 7 and 8? **Jane Hoskyn** reveals how to replace and restore Microsoft's retired tools

It's out with the old and in with the new in Windows 10 – and that's not necessarily a good thing. Tools that you know and perhaps love from Windows XP, 7 and 8/8.1 have been consigned to history's big Recycle Bin to make way for new stuff.

Some of this new stuff is definitely worth the sacrifice (we love Windows 10's virtual desktops, for example) and some definitely isn't. The silly new 'personal assistant' Cortana and Bing-infested browser Edge have already proved less popular than Windows Media Center (WMC) – dumped by Microsoft on the grounds that it's not part of "the future of entertainment" (www.snipca.com/18404).

So we're here to help, with a hand-picked selection of free alternative tools (and a cheeky little hack or two) to replace or restore features that didn't make the final cut in Windows 10.

Watch video without Windows Media Center

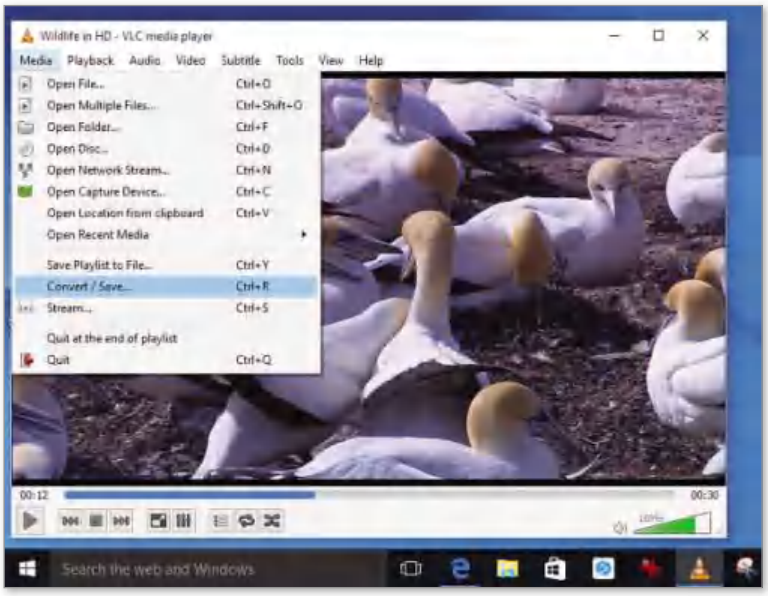
WMC (www.snipca.com/18399) does still exist, and you can use it in Windows 7 or 8/8.1 for playing DVDs, watching TV and even recording online video. It's like a set-top box built into your PC or laptop. But if you upgrade that PC to Windows 10, WMC will stop working – Windows 10 doesn't support playing DVDs at all.

There is a way to beat the system and make WMC work again (see box at the top pf page 57), but it's easier and safer to switch to an alternative tool. Our favourite is VLC media player (www.videolan.org). VLC lets you play DVDs and WMC recordings ('.wtv' files), along with Blu-ray and dozens more video and audio formats; plus streaming video from sites like BBC iPlayer and even via Chromecast.

VLC is open-source software, so there are no hidden costs. There's plenty of community support (www.videolan.org/support) and a wide selection of extensions ('add-ons') that let you add subtitles, record web streams, block radio adverts and more. Here's the full list, with the highest-rated extensions first: www.snipca.com/18419.

It is possible to record BBC iPlayer programmes using VLC (www.snipca.com/18420), just as you'd record any video stream, though the BBC would rather you didn't. Besides which, it's easier to download programmes using the iPlayer itself. The resulting file is likely to be better quality and more stable – but it will eventually expire. The BBC explains all on its site (www.snipca.com/18422).

VLC works in all versions of Windows and will continue to be updated for Windows 10 by its network of developers. There's a VLC app for Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/18433), too, if you'd rather sidestep the installer (which is safe).



VLC lets you watch DVDs and dozens more video formats in Windows 10

Watch live TV in Windows 10

One WMC function you won't find in VLC is live TV support. Given the number of catch-up services you can watch instead, you may decide this isn't a problem. But if you really miss live telly on your PC, we've got a couple of good open-source Windows 10 alternatives for you.

Kodi (http://kodi.tv/download) is your best bet if you prefer Windows 7 to Windows 8. This free tool started out as a hack for watching live TV on the Xbox, and was called Xbox Media Center

Watch live TV on your PC using free tool Kodi – but you will need a TV tuner card

(XBMC). It evolved into a powerful WMC alternative for Windows and other platforms – including Linux and Android (www.snipca.com/18416) – and has extensions for recording TV, downloading subtitles and even checking the weather. For more information see the wiki support site (http://kodi.wiki) and 'First time user' guide (www.snipca.com/18418).

MediaPortal (www.team-mediaportal.com; see Best Free Software, Issue 450) has similar functions and extensions. But its Windows 8-style features, such as default full-screen, won't suit everyone.

Whichever program you choose, you'll need a TV tuner card (wikipedia page: www.snipca.com/18423) that plugs into your PC. You'll already know this if you used WMC to watch live TV. Your WMC-era TV tuner should continue to work in Windows 10, according to users of Kodi and MediaPortal (read this thread on the Bit-tech forum: www.snipca.com/18417).

Play Solitaire online

Windows 10's attempt to replace Solitaire has been pretty disastrous. As mentioned in our Cover Feature in Issue 461, Microsoft's new Solitaire Collection app (www.snipca.com/18424) is free to download, but users have found it's littered with (Upgrade) pop-ups and adverts.

Forget that, because there's a much better alternative. Free tool World of Solitaire (http://worldofsolitaire.com) works entirely in your browser and offers dozens more games besides Solitaire, including Klondike and Spanish Patience. There are help guides and customising options, and you can create an account to save your settings and scores if you want.

Play Solitaire for free online in World of Solitaire

World of Solitaire is a great example of online tools that outclass their downloadable counterparts. Web tools don't clog up your hard drive and are safer than installing software. However, many have adverts to keep them free, so use an advert-blocker like the Adblock Plus extension (https://adblockplus.org) to remove annoying distractions.

If your internet is too slow to play online, try the free open-source games suite, Python Solitaire Fan Club edition (or 'PySolFC', as it styles itself: http://pysolfc.sourceforge.net). The 'Fan Club' bit was added after PySol was handed to its community by its creator in 2003 (www.pysol.org).

Now, there's good news and bad news. The good news is PySolFC includes more than 1,000 card games, is easy to install and works fine on our Windows 10 laptop – despite there being no mention of Windows 10 on PySolFC's site or Sourceforge's download page (www.snipca.com/18425).

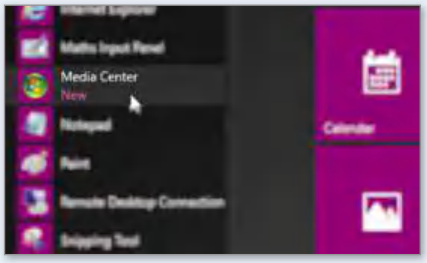
And the bad news? Solitaire isn't included. No, really. If you click Select, then 'All games by name' and then 'Sig – Spi' (there are so many games, they are grouped alphabetically), the list goes ▶

HACK WINDOWS 10 TO BRING BACK WMC

There is a way to install WMC in Windows 10, but it breaks Microsoft's terms and conditions. Those who've tried it reckon it's safe and it works, up to a point. If you were to do it, what steps would you take?

First, you'd download the WMC support file from storage site Mega (www.snipca.com/18405; click the 'Download through your browser' link). Save and extract the RAR folder. RAR is like ZIP but you may need a third-party tool to open it; the free version of WinRAR (www.win-rar.com) is the best bet.

After extracting the files, right-click '_TestRight.cmd' and click 'Run as administrator'. Command Prompt should automatically open, and start creating a list of services. Exit when Command Prompt tells you to.



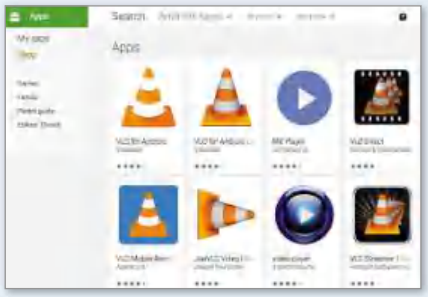
Next, run the 'Installed.cmd' file as administrator and let Command Prompt create more services. Exit Command Prompt, and WMC should be back on your PC. You'll find it in 'All apps' (Start menu), or type media center in the search box.

The downside of this hack, apart from its questionable legality, is that it doesn't include live TV support – so you might as well use VLC anyway.

SPOT THE REAL VLC APP

VLC makes apps for your tablet and phone, and even for Kindle Fire. But which "VLC" app is real? If you type vlc into the Google Play Store you'll get lots of results (see screenshot), but none are attributed to VLC's maker, VideoLAN.

The real one is 'VLC for Android' (www.snipca.com/18414), as linked from the VLC site (www.snipca.com/18411); confusingly, the maker is listed as 'Videolabs'. For iPad and iPhone, the real app is 'VLC for iOS' (www.snipca.com/18415), which *is* attributed to VideoLAN.



If in doubt, always follow links from the VideoLAN site (www.videolan.org).

straight from 'Solid Square' to 'Somerset'. Presumably Solitaire's omission is a copyright matter, but it clearly hasn't affected World of Solitaire.

Get instant weather updates without Gadgets

Like Solitaire, Windows Desktop Gadgets were jettisoned after Windows 7, so you'll lose them if you're upgrading from 7 to 10.

Gadgets were an early attempt at creating 'widgets' (on-screen tools that display real-time information). You could check the weather, control Windows Media Player and even monitor your processor by glancing at your Desktop.

Unfortunately, the Windows Sidebar platform that Gadgets used turned out to be riddled with security holes (as Microsoft explains at: www.snipca.com/18426). Rather than fix them, Microsoft gave up on them.

The closest – and safest – third-party alternative is 8GadgetPack (www.snipca.com/18406), which brings back Gadgets more or less as they were in Windows Vista and 7 (see our Workshop on page 40). You can also download free widget packs from the Windows Store. Widgets HD (www.snipca.com/18427) has weather updates, sticky notes and more, and Lockscreenify (www.snipca.com/18428) has news and weather widgets for your Windows 10 lock screen.

You don't need Gadgets in Windows 10 – get updates from apps like 8-Bit Weather instead

Alternatively, why not use Desktop apps? Rather than funnelling data constantly into your PC, Windows 10 tile apps update the moment you open them.

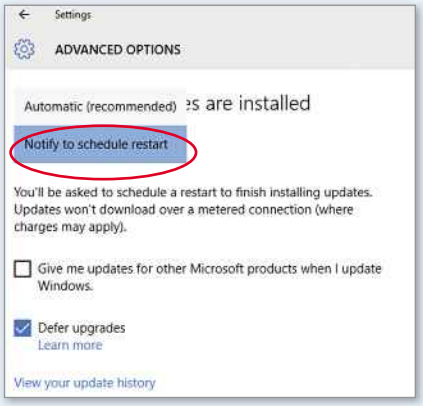
If you want free weather updates, for example, you're spoiled for choice. Weather Satellite (www.snipca.com/ 18431) has real-time satellite images of hurricanes, fog, tornadoes and drizzle as seen from space; 8-Bit Weather (www.snipca.com/18430) offers up-to-the-minute forecasts in fabulous old-school 8-bit graphics (see screenshot above); and 'Got the Weather' (www.snipca.com/ 18432) has simple weather info for anywhere in the world.

Restore your tidy Windows 7-style Start list by unpinning all your tile formats in Windows 10

TAKE CONTROL OF WINDOWS UPDATE

Windows 10 installs patches and updates automatically. This means less hassle for you and a safer PC (see our 'Add patch power to your antivirus' feature, Issue 461).

There's a downside, of course. Automatic means automatic – whether you like it or not. Only Windows 10's Pro and Enterprise editions (www.snipca.com/18440) let you configure Windows Update like you could in previous versions of Windows.



That's not quite the loss of control it sounds. You can tell Windows to notify you before it restarts your PC – useful if you want to avoid sudden restarts when you're in the middle of work. Type windows update into Start, then click 'Advanced Windows Update options'. Open the 'Automatic (recommended)' dropdown menu and click 'Notify to schedule restart' (see screenshot).

You can also defer upgrades (new Builds) for months at a time (www.snipca.com/18441) by ticking 'Defer upgrades' on the Advanced Options screen.

If you want a full 'Configure Automatic Updates' option in Windows 10 Home edition, you'll need to hack the Registry. You can find the steps online (www.snipca.com/18442) but they're certainly not endorsed by Microsoft – or recommended by us. Automatic updates may seem impertinent but they're vital for security. It's too easy to forget (or choose to forget) to install an update, and that leaves your PC open to malware.

Bring back the tile-free Start menu

Windows 10's Start menu is closer to the list style of Windows 7 than the screen-hogging tiles of Windows 8/8.1, but you can get rid of the tiles altogether if you want (along with the annoying phrase that sits above them: 'Life at a glance').

To remove a tile, right-click it and then click 'Unpin from Start'. Repeat with each tile until you've got a big empty box. Now click and drag the right edge of the box to the left, so it closes the gap. Voila! you've got your Windows 7-style list back.

Removing a Windows 10 tile doesn't uninstall its app or change any Windows settings. The tiles are just shortcuts, like in Android. Only iOS uninstalls apps when you remove their icons.

Alternatively, install the free tool Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net). It became very popular among Windows 8 users who were appalled by the default Start Screen and wanted their menu back. It's now been updated to work in Windows 10 as well, so you can restore the classic Windows 7 Start menu or customise it to suit you. ca

See next issue's Cover Feature: Best Free Software for Windows 10

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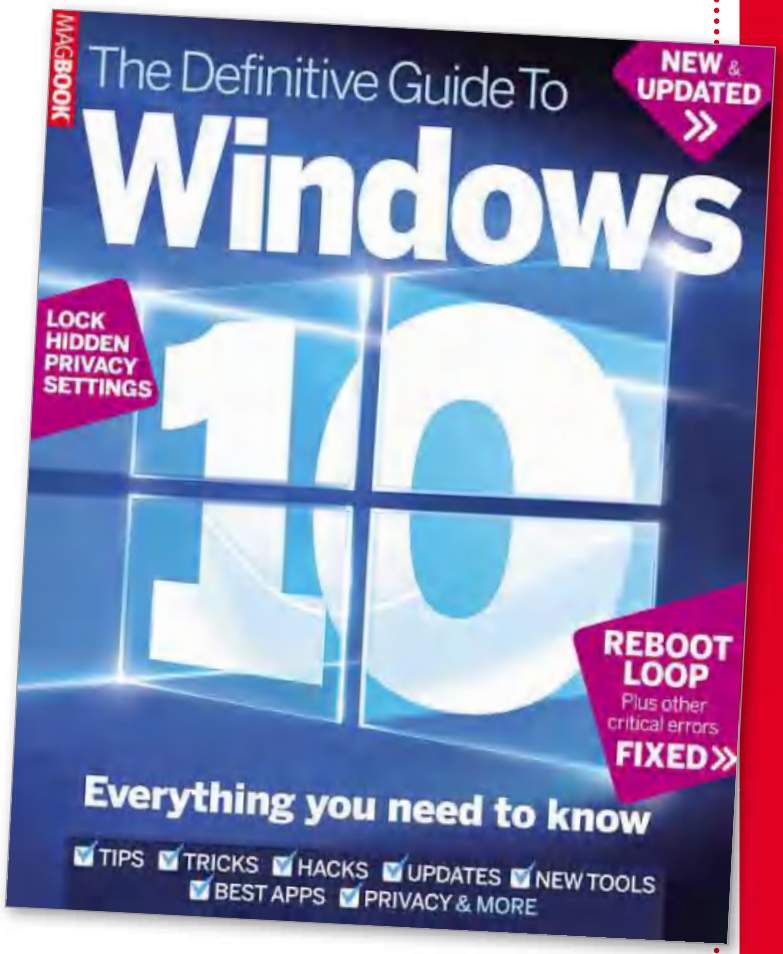


Thanks to the following readers for their reviews of the book on Amazon

I was a little bit nervous about upgrading to Windows 10, so I was looking for a more substantial, comprehensive book – and this did the job exactly. The language is clear, with no jargon, nothing too 'technical'.
Bill Daniels 1973 ★★★★★

An excellent guide to Windows 10 from installation to daily use. Thoroughly recommended to anyone upgrading from XP, Vista, 7 or 8.
JimIrv ★★★★★

Best Windows 10 guide I've come across yet. Others at a similar price were written for Windows 8/8.1 and subsequently 'bodged' to cover Windows 10.
George R. Profit ★★★★★

If you've got Windows 10, you need instructions. This is an extremely good 'starter for 10'.
Rayon ★★★★★

Great price. Easy to follow for the computer novice. A really good way to get to know Windows 10.
Mark ★★★★★

A very helpful book which explains things I didn't understand about Windows 10.
Sandynostawon ★★★★★

A great book in plain English with good illustrations.
EM Townendon ★★★★★

*At the time of press

What you must tick in CCleaner

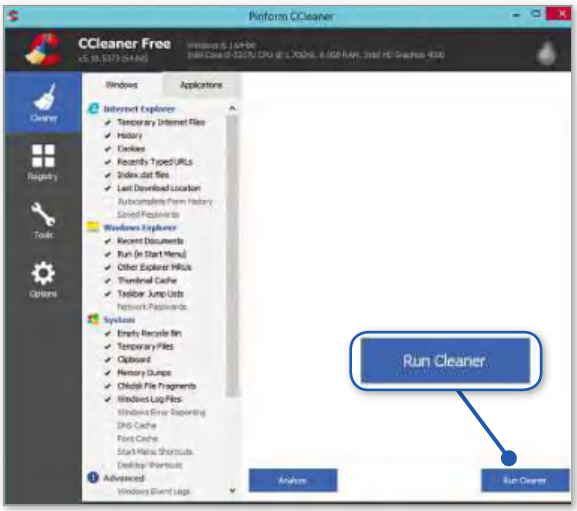
Your PC is full of junk files that CCleaner can easily remove – but don't overdo it. **Jane Hoskyn** explains how to get the best out of this brilliant tool

One of our favourite free programs ever, CCleaner is a quick but thorough solution to the perennial problem of junk files that clog up and slow down your PC. And yet it can be too thorough, if you're not careful. Merrily tick every box, click Run Cleaner and slope off for a cup of tea, and you may come back to find that your browser has forgotten all your passwords and some of your programs won't work.

Like a Formula One car, CCleaner is packed with power but needs careful handling. Here, we'll show you how to get the best out of it – without driving your PC into the crash barriers.

What to tick for a rough and ready boost

When you run CCleaner – ideally as an administrator (www.snipca.com/18465) – it opens on the Windows tab. The tab contains a list of tick boxes, each representing a type of system junk.



Leave all boxes pre-ticked, then click Run Cleaner for an instant speed boost

Several boxes are pre-ticked, as you can see from our screenshot left (we haven't ticked/unticked anything yet). For a basic speed boost, click Run Cleaner to remove all the ticked junk, then restart your PC.

For a greater speed boost, tick some of the greyed-out boxes as well. DNS and Font Cache, Start Menu and Desktop Shortcuts, and all the junk under Internet Explorer (IE) can be obliterated without killing your PC. You'll lose data such as saved IE passwords and program shortcuts, but this comprehensive clear-out will free up hard-drive space and remove stored data that hackers could possibly access, and may even give an old PC a real spring in its step.

WHICH CCLEANER IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

CCleaner Free: The installable version (currently version 5.10 – as shown in our screenshots) is the most powerful free version of CCleaner. It integrates with your operating system (OS), so it can be launched from certain right-click menus and supports plug-ins like CCEnhancer.

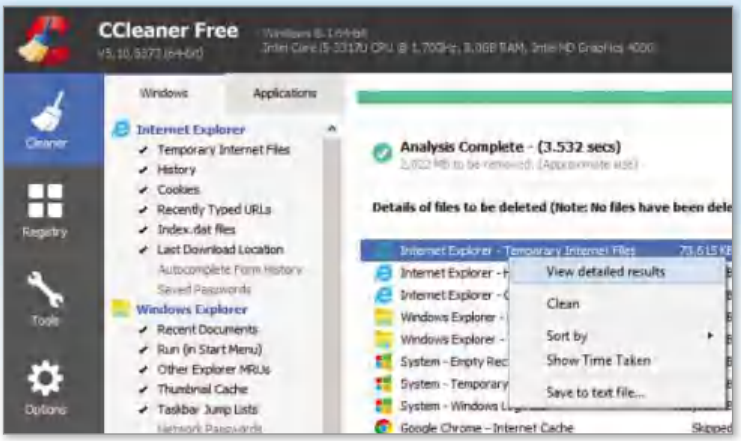
To get it, go to www.piriform.com/ccleaner and click Download Free Version, then Free Download and then Download again. Save and run the EXE file ('ccsetup510.exe'). There are no PUPs to worry about – all the tick boxes represent configuration options. It works in all supported versions of Windows.

CCleaner Portable: Ideal for cleaning XP PCs. Download the ZIP file (www.snipca.com/18454, second button down) using a supported version of Windows, then extract and copy the folder to a USB stick for running on your PC.

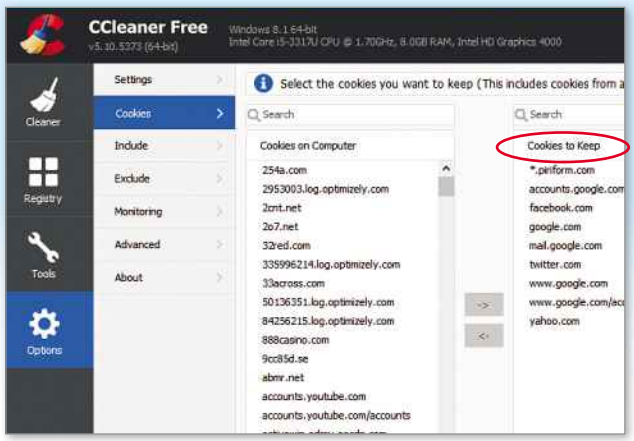
CCleaner Cloud: This new, free web-based version (www.snipca.com/ 18456, see screenshot), including stablemate Piriform tools Defraggler and Speccy, lets you clean more than one PC from any other, using an online dashboard. Ideal if you regularly use multiple PCs.

CCleaner for Android: Great free app for removing junk files from your tablet and phone (www.snipca.com/18457). There's no genuine CCleaner for iOS.

CCleaner Pro: Don't bother. It's $24.95 (£16.33) for extra 'real-time monitoring' (pointless) and 'premium support' (use the forum instead: http://forum.piriform.com).



Use the Analyze tool to investigate junk files before obliterating them



Add your most visited websites to the 'Cookies to Keep' list

Click Analyze to stay safe

Such a gung-ho approach may be fine for an ageing PC that you rarely use, but on your main PC it may do more harm than good. You may lose backup data, passwords and settings – for the sake of deleting a few files that actually took up hardly any hard-drive space.

To help avoid this, click Analyze first. CCleaner will delve deeper into the junk you've ticked, then create a list that reveals how much space each type of data takes up.

Right-click any item in the list for more information (click 'View detailed results' – see screenshot above), which you can save as a text file. You can then clean that item from the right-click menu, without removing any other ticked junk.

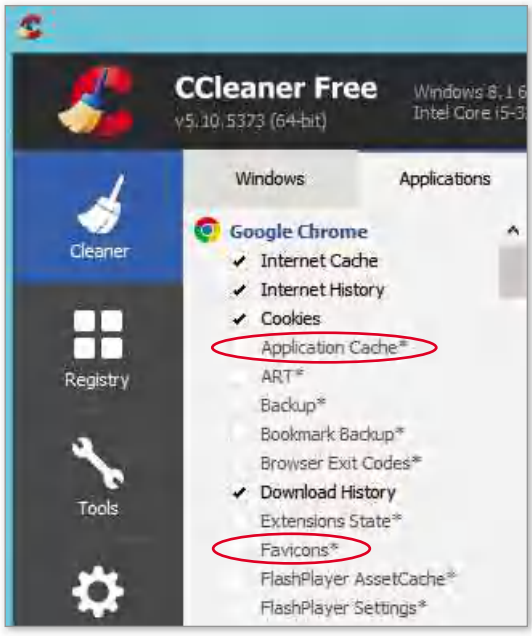
Tick more junk in Applications

CCleaner's Applications tab collects junk created by your third-party tools. Here, you'll find tick boxes for browser caches, Adobe Flash Player files and other junk your PC is better off without.

To add more junk-removal options, download CCEnhancer (www.snipca.com/18458). This free plug-in was created by CCleaner users who wanted to add more cleaning options, such as Skype Temporary Files and Chrome Installer – neither available by default in CCleaner.

The latest version of CCEnhancer adds dozens of tick boxes to your Applications tab, depending on which programs you've installed (this means you won't get the Chrome tick boxes if you don't have Chrome installed, for example).

Download CCEnhancer, run its portable EXE file and click Download Latest to update its definitions. Next time you run CCleaner, the Applications tab will have new options, such as Application Cache and Favicons (see screenshot left), which are marked by an asterisk. None of the extra options are ticked by default, so tick those you want to include.



CCEnhancer adds dozens more tick boxes to CCleaner's Applications tab

At the time of writing, CCEnhancer's site makes no mention that it supports Windows 8.1 or 10, but it works fine on our 8.1 laptop (see the forum: www.snipca.com/18459).

Protect your passwords

CCleaner clears all your internet cookies by default, but you might want to keep the ones that automatically log you into your favourite websites.

To add an internet cookie to a whitelist, click Options and then Cookies, and type the relevant website into the 'Cookies to Keep' pane on the right (see screenshot above right). Also be careful about ticking too many options added by CCEnhancer. Many of these extra options let you remove passwords and browser settings that you'll soon wish you hadn't wiped.

The Analyze tool only lets you investigate items listed by CCleaner itself, not those added by CCEnhancer. If you're not sure whether to delete or keep an item with an asterisk, search for information about it online.

Stop CCleaner slowing your PC

You don't need CCleaner to 'monitor' your PC by running constantly in the background. This is supposed to be a feature of the Pro (paid-for)version, but you may find it happens in the free version anyway. This will only slow your PC down. Click Options, Monitoring, then untick 'Enable system monitoring'. Also remove CCleaner from the list of programs that run when you start Windows. Download the free portable tool Autoruns (www.snipca.com/18461), scroll through its startup list for mentions of CCleaner, then untick them.

TICK EVERYTHING IN ADWCLEANER

One type of junk CCleaner can't detect or remove is adware – and that's where AdwCleaner (www.snipca.com/18466) comes in. This free tool is no substitute for CCleaner but it's an essential companion, and much easier to use.

Run the portable program as administrator, click Scan and wait for the scan to complete. Then click the tabs (Folders, Files and so on) to see the malicious files found in different areas of your PC.

Don't untick any of them! Every one of these files must be removed from your computer. Click the Cleaning button, let AdwCleaner delete your junk, and then restart your PC.

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STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

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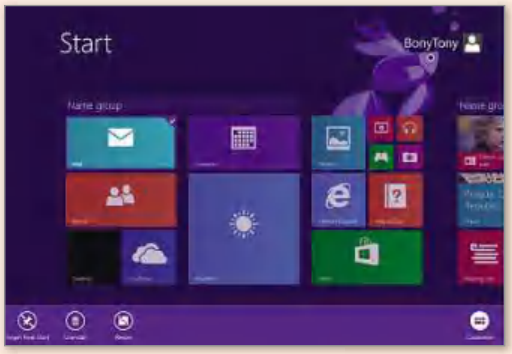
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Do I need Outlook and Windows Live Mail?

Q I bought a new Windows 8.1 PC and had Outlook Express (OE) reinstalled as my email program. But the new setup also includes Windows Live Mail (WLM), and on occasions the machine wants to use it instead of OE. I'm not sure what WLM is and whether it's worth running alongside OE. I can't find an explanation I can understand. Can you give me one? I have got as far as trying to set up an account in WLM, but I get lost at the start, when it asks for my email address. I'm sorry if all this sounds daft.



Remove the unwanted Mail app in Windows 8.1 by right-clicking the Mail tile then clicking Uninstall

Chris Benfield

A We're surprised that you had OE installed on your Windows 8.1 computer, because OE is no longer available or supported by Microsoft. There are 'modified' versions of OE available online but Microsoft's involvement in these is zero, and their legality is therefore highly questionable.

Your explanation that you 'had OE reinstalled' suggests that a technician may have done this for you, so it's possible that you are without realising it using a legally suspect version of OE. Alternatively, your technician may have installed Windows XP in a virtual PC to allow you to continue running OE that way – but that's something of an awkward workaround, and we think you'd notice if that were the case.

We checked the hidden encoding information in your email to us, and noticed that the message was sent using 'Outlook 14.0' – the codename for Outlook 2010. We don't know for sure that you used the same PC to send this message, but it seems likely, so we think you're actually using Outlook 2010. This has some visual similarities to OE, but is an entirely different Microsoft program.

Now let's consider Windows Live Mail (WLM), which is Microsoft's free email program – and OE's spiritual successor. WLM isn't in Windows 8.1, so you (or your technician) would have downloaded and installed it separately. But there's little point in having or using WLM, because you already use Outlook 2010. If WLM *is* installed, uninstall it by pressing Windows key+X, then click Control Panel followed by 'Uninstall a program' under Programs. Find and click WLM, then click Uninstall.

But we're also wondering if you've confused WLM with Mail, which *does* come with Windows 8.1 and is the operating system's default email program. You'd be forgiven for this confusion because Microsoft has created a total mess with these endless email tools, not to mention name changes (Windows Live Mail used to be called Windows Mail).

Clicking any links in some other Windows 8.1 tile app might prompt Mail to launch, which could explain why you're being prompted to set up a new account. To remove Mail, click Start to show the Start screen, then right-click the Mail tile, choose Uninstall from the menu then click the Uninstall button to confirm.

Why has Windows Photo Gallery stopped working?

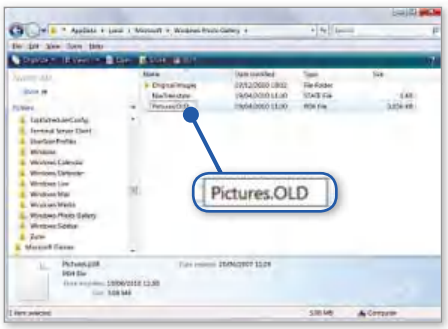
Q When I launch Windows Photo Gallery (WPG), I see an error message saying that the program has encountered an error and can't start, along with the error code 0x8007000b. I used to use WPG all the time, so I don't know what's happened – but I really want to sort it out. Can you help?

T Kilgannon

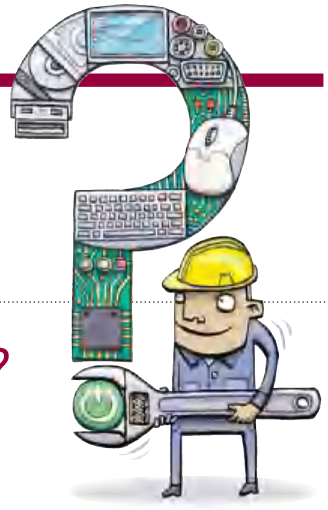
A This can happen when WPG's database index becomes corrupt. We can't say for sure how that happened but an unexpected shutdown due to a power cut or Windows crashing are both possible causes. All you need to do to fix this is delete or rename the corrupted index file. This forces WPG to create a new one when it's next launched.

First, make sure WPG is closed and then press Windows key+R to open the Run box. If you're using Windows XP, type %userprofile%\Local Settings\Application Data\Microsoft\Windows Live Photo Gallery and press Enter; for later Windows versions type %userprofile%\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows Photo Gallery and press Enter.

This opens the folder containing WPG's index files. You're looking for a file called either 'Pictures.pd4' or 'Pictures.pd5'. Click it, press F2 to rename it and then call it something different, such as 'Pictures.OLD'. Press Enter to finish and then launch WPG. After it's spent a short time rebuilding its index, you should be good to go.



Rename Windows Photo Gallery's index file if the program stops working



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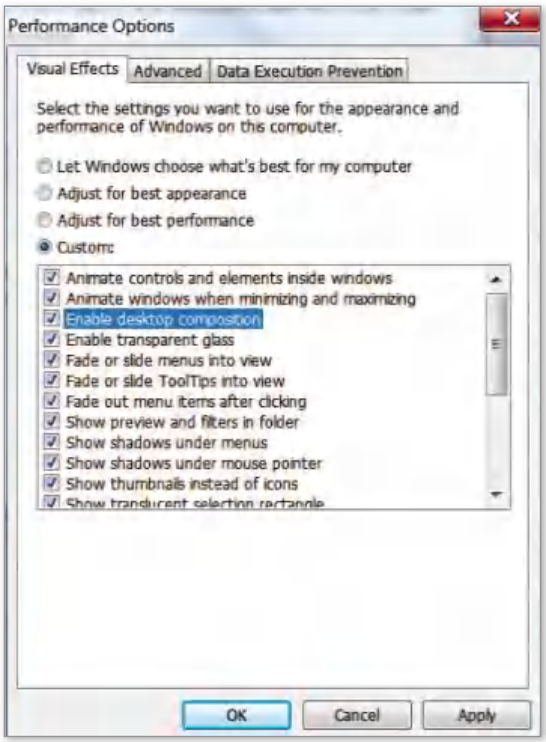
How do I enable Taskbar thumbnail previews?

Q I have recently moved to a new Windows 7 laptop, transferring all my files and programs successfully from my old PC. I use a karaoke program called Karafun (www.karafun.com) that automatically outputs to a second monitor (though I'm guessing the problem would apply to any program that outputs in this way).

With my old laptop, I could hover my cursor over the active program icon in the Taskbar and the contents of the second monitor would appear as a small thumbnail. This was very helpful if I couldn't quite see my second monitor. The thumbnail doesn't appear on my new computer. I've no idea how I activated the feature originally or how Windows refers to it. I have tried Googling it but without any luck. Please help as I miss it.

Dave Bunce

A What you're missing are known as Taskbar thumbnail previews, but it's odd that they're unavailable on your new laptop because they are enabled by default. Moreover, disabling them is actually quite tricky – except for one inadvertent method that we're about to expand upon, and which is probably the cause of your problem.



To restore missing Taskbar thumbnail previews ensure this option is ticked in your Performance settings

We're wondering if you've switched your new Windows 7 laptop's graphical theme, perhaps to make it easier to read in the dark when you're performing with Karafun? If so, and you've selected a Windows theme that doesn't support Windows Aero's graphical features (such as High Contrast or Windows Classic), this will as a side effect have disabled the Taskbar thumbnail previews.

To check, open Control Panel, then click 'Appearance and Personalization' followed by Personalization. If you've selected an option that isn't in the Aero Themes section, that's the cause of your problem. Select an Aero theme to fix it.

If you do have an Aero theme selected then perhaps you've followed tips to speed up performance? These often recommend disabling various options that could in turn prevent Taskbar thumbnail previews from working. In Control Panel, click 'System and Maintenance', 'Performance Information and Tools' and then 'Adjust visual effects'. Now look through the list and make sure 'Enable desktop composition' is ticked.

What's this Android error?

Q When I switch on my Nexus 7 tablet I'm faced with the following banner message: "Unfortunately, the process com.google.process.gapps has stopped". I tap OK and it disappears, only to return soon after. Short of returning to factory settings I'm at a loss as to how I can rid the tablet of this message. Any ideas?

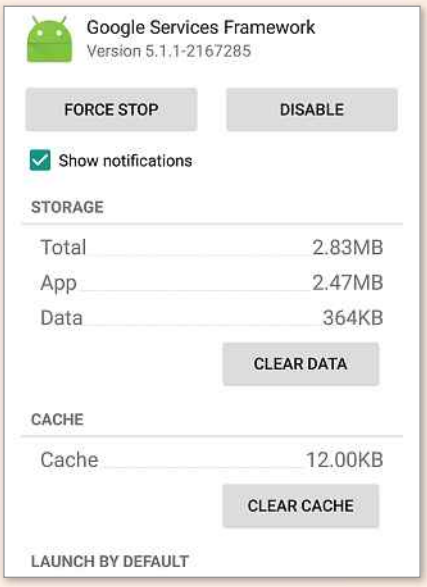
James Stewart

A This is caused by a misbehaving or outdated app. Have you tried 'soft-resetting' your device? You won't lose any data, but it will force everything to stop and restart. Just hold down your Nexus 7's power button for around 10 seconds, until the screen clears and the Google logo appears.

If this doesn't do the trick, make sure all your apps are up to date. In the Play Store app, tap the menu (three horizontal lines), followed by 'My apps' and then either tap Update All or, if you want more control over your updates, the individual Update buttons.

If the error continues, try clearing data for individual apps. Tap Settings, followed by Apps, tap an app then tape Clear Data followed by Clear Cache (see screenshot).

If you still have no joy, try resetting all app preferences. In the Apps screen in Settings, swipe over to ALL then tap the menu (three dots) then tap 'Reset app preferences' followed by Reset Apps.



If problematic Android apps are causing error messages, clear their data and cache

Problems Solved

How do I transfer from Palm to Android or Apple?

Q I am running Palm Desktop 4.2 in Windows XP. I want to transfer all my data to an Android or Apple tablet. How do I do this, and do I need any conversion software?

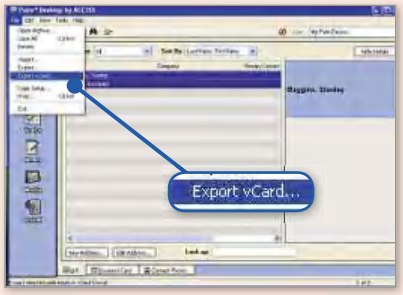
Tony Smith

A There are different types of data and different ways to import them into different devices, but the basic techniques are very similar. We'll focus on the key information – contacts and calendars.

Launch Palm Desktop, select Address, press Control (Ctrl)+A to select all. Next, open the File menu, choose Export, type a name for the file, then click Export. That's your contacts exported. For your calendar and appointments, click Date and do the same, though you don't need to select all.

The files won't be huge so an easy way to get them on to a tablet is to email the files to yourself as attachments. Palm Desktop will save the exported calendar with a .vcs file extension: to add this to an Apple device, you'll need to change the extension to .ics. On your PC, just press F2 and type over it.

In your tablet's email program, open the email, tap an attachment and then the appropriate option. On an iPad, for example, tap the contacts file (with a .vcf extension) then tap Add All X Contacts (where X indicates the number of contacts).



Export your Palm Desktop data to your PC via its File menu

How do I change my computer's name?

Q I bought my computer almost three years ago and hired a so-called computer expert to transfer my files from my old PC to the new one. My Windows Desktop was returned, but named as 'Adam's computer', with 'Adam's files', 'Adam's photographs' and so on. All very well, except my name is Alan. I know it doesn't really matter, but I'd prefer it to use my actual name.

I don't want to return to the aforementioned 'expert', so I wonder if there's a simple fix to tell my computer that it belongs to me.

Alan Edey

Change your PC's Windows account name via your User Accounts settings

A The answer depends on what specifically your deficient expert did. From your description we have a strong feeling that he or she gathered your personal stuff and put it all on to your new computer's Windows Desktop, in a folder called 'Adam's computer', which contained all your other misnamed folders.

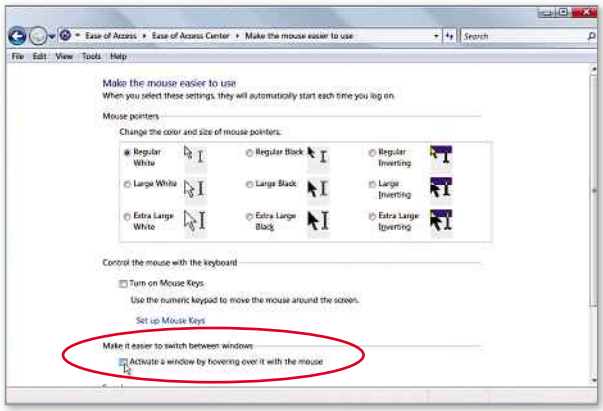
If that's the case then the simple solution is to click to select the 'Adam's computer' folder then press F2 and type the correct name. Then, double-click the renamed 'Alan's computer' to find and do the same with the other misnomers.

However, it's possible your expert set up the new computer with the wrong name. Click Start, type user accounts, then click User Accounts. Make sure your account is selected, click 'Change your account name' then type Alan and click Change Name.

How do I stop background windows scrolling?

Q A while ago, I followed a tip of yours that explained how to make background windows scroll without clicking on them. That was very useful at the time because I had two monitors connected to my Windows 7 PC and always had lots of windows open at once. Since then, one of my monitors has died and, while I intend to replace it when finances allow, with just one monitor I now find this feature more annoying than useful – but I don't know how to disable it? Do you remember?

John Chalk



Prevent background windows scrolling in Windows 7 by unticking this option in the Ease of Access Center

A We know the feature you're talking about, and we know how to disable it.

It's called 'Make it easier to switch between windows', and is controlled by a tick box hidden in Windows 7's Ease of Access Center. Click Start, followed by Control Panel, then 'Ease of Access' followed by 'Change how your mouse works'. Now clear the tick from the 'Activate a window by hovering over it with the mouse' box. Click Save.

How do I move email groups from Windows XP to 7?

Q **Is it possible to move the email addresses contained in a group created with Outlook Express on a Windows XP computer to another computer that uses Windows Live Mail (WLM) and runs Windows 7? I'm trying to avoid having to individually type some 200 email addresses.**

John Robinson

Export all your email addresses from one version of Windows to another by exporting them as a Windows Address Book file

A Yes, although be warned – the process isn't easy.

Though you can export contacts via Outlook Express, this won't help you when you come to import your groups to Windows 7 (or later versions for that matter). To do that, you'll need to work with a program called Windows Address Book (WAB) on both computers. WAB is what Outlook Express actually draws on for contact management, though few people are aware of its existence.

On your XP computer, press Windows key+R to open the Run box, then type wab.exe and press Enter. Open WAB's File menu, hover over Export then click 'Address Book (WAB)'. Type a name for your address-book file (such as myaddressbook.wab), choose a location and then click Save.

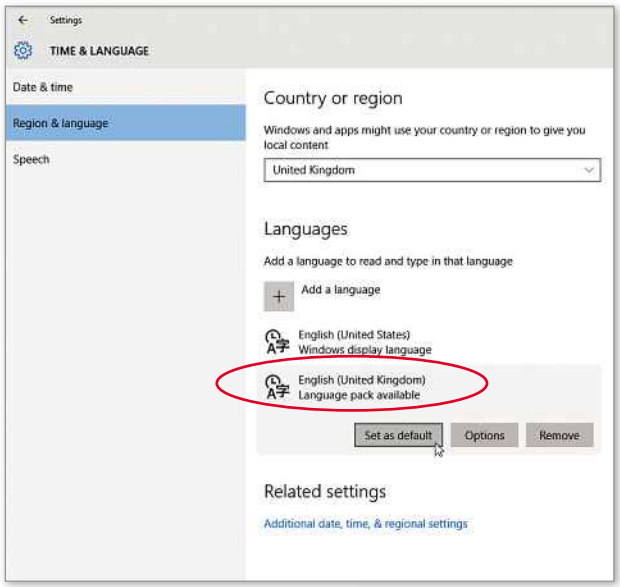
You now need to copy the 'myaddressbook.wab' file to your Windows 7 computer. Once it's there, double-click it. The 'Import WAB file' dialogue box will appear; simply click Import to confirm. The Contacts folder will now open, which is where you manage contacts in Windows 7. Find the group you wish to email, right-click it then point your cursor to Actions and choose 'Send E-mail' to create a new message in your default email program (which should be WLM, if you have it installed).

Why can't I talk to Cortana?

Q **Despite having United Kingdom set in 'Country or region' and both 'English (United Kingdom)' and 'English (United States)' in Languages in Windows 10, Cortana tells me that she isn't "supported in the region and language selected".**

Do you have any idea how I can talk to her?

Chris Holmes



Windows 10's 'Region & language' settings have ways of making Cortana talk

A The problem here is that to work Cortana requires multiple language settings to be aligned. Microsoft did issue an update to deal with a bug that prevented Cortana from working even when language settings were properly aligned, but we don't think that's the problem here. Instead, we think you've either got 'English (United States)' set as the default language, or you've yet to download the necessary language and speech packs.

You've already found the relevant settings pages, but for the benefit of other readers: click Start, followed by Settings, then 'Time & language' in the left-hand navigation pane. Next, click 'Region & language' and, under Languages, click 'English (United Kingdom)' followed by 'Set as default'. If it's greyed out, then it's already your default. Now click next to the Options button and click Download under both 'Download language pack' and Speech (if one or other Download button is missing, you already have these elements installed).

Once the downloads have completed, click Speech in the left-hand pane, choose 'English (United Kingdom)' under 'Speech language' and tick 'Recognize non-native accents for this language'. Now restart your PC.

Finally, click Start, followed by the Search/Cortana icon (magnifying glass), then click the cog icon there and slide the Cortana switch to its On position. Cortana will now guide you through setup.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 25 Nov

- How do I send from a different email address on Android?
- Why does my display show rotating colours?
- How do I disable my touchpad in Windows 10?

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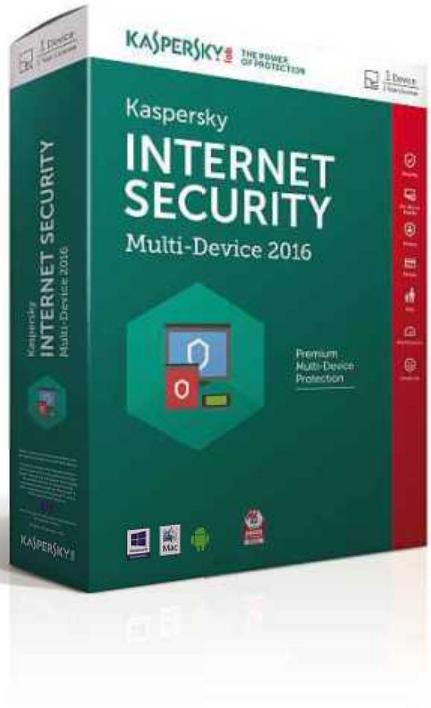

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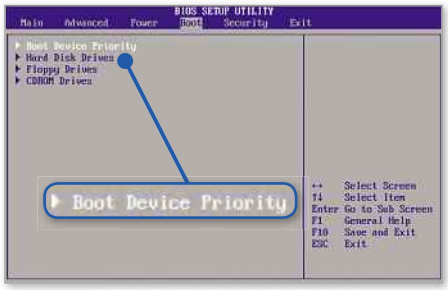
USB sticks

Speed up slow USBs, recover lost files and fix 'device not recognised' error messages

Bootable USB stick won't boot

You've made a bootable USB stick but Windows ignores it? You probably need to rejig your BIOS settings. For older computers running Windows 7 or earlier, tap F2 or Delete (Del) after switching on, then use the cursor (arrow) keys and Enter to navigate the BIOS screens: you're looking for something like 'Boot Order' or 'Boot Device Priority'. Your USB stick must be higher in this list than the hard drive.

To access the modern 'UEFI' BIOS on newer Windows 8.1/10 PCs requires different methods. In Windows 8.1, press Win+C then click Settings followed by 'Change PC settings'. In Windows 10, click Start then Settings. Now click 'Update and recovery' followed by Recovery, then 'Restart now' under 'Advanced startup'. Finally, click Troubleshoot, then 'Advanced options' and UEFI Firmware Settings, then click Restart.



If your bootable USB stick won't boot, access the BIOS to change the boot priority

USB running much slower than normal

If your USB stick is slow and unresponsive, you may have attached it to an older type of USB port. All modern PCs have one or more USB 3.0 ports, identified by a blue plastic insert (see photo above right); but many still have older (and slower) USB 2.0 slots as well. Your PC might even have some archaic USB 1.1 ports lurking around the rear. So, take your stick out and slot it into a different socket – preferably one with the blue interior. Incidentally, this applies to multi-USB hubs, some of which support only old USB 2.0/1.1 connections.

Stick running slow? Check it's connected to a blue USB 3.0 port or hub

Files won't save or become corrupted

Bad news – your USB stick might be faulty or fake. As we explained in Issue 461's Problems Solved (page 65), fake USB sticks appear to work perfectly until their real capacity is reached, then chaos beckons. There's no fixing them.

Even if your stick definitely isn't fake, most faults are still almost impossible to repair. However, you might be able to recover lost files. Download and launch the free version of file-recovery program Recuva (automatic download from www.snipca.com/18185), select your USB stick and click Scan. Tick the files you need to rescue, then click the Recover button.

USB stick doesn't appear in Explorer

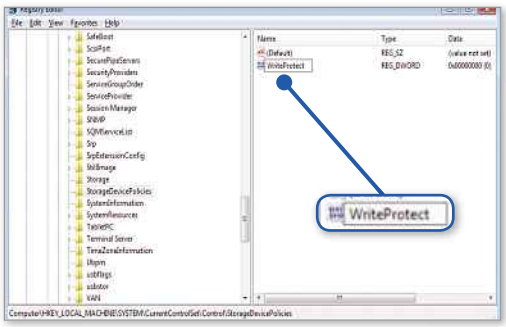
If you see 'USB Device Not Recognized' after inserting your stick, try plugging it into a different USB port. If that does no good, launch Disk Management by pressing Win+R, typing diskmgmt.msc and pressing Enter. Look for a drive labelled 'Removable' that matches your stick's capacity. If it's listed as 'Healthy' and has a 'Primary' partition, then Windows might have failed to assign it a drive letter. Right-click the partition then choose 'Change Drive Letter and Paths'. Now click Add and choose a drive letter. If it doesn't appear in Disk Management then press Win+R, type devmgmt.msc and press Enter. Double-click both Disk Drives and 'Universal Serial Bus controllers' and look for entries with a yellow triangle. Right-click any you find, choose Properties, note the error message in 'Device status' then search Google to investigate the problem.

USB stick won't work in your TV

Many modern TVs have USB ports and will play video files straight from a USB stick – but only if the drive is formatted in a way they'll recognise. Windows' preferred file system, NTFS, won't work with some TVs, so you'll need to format your USB stick to the older FAT32 file system. Press Win+E to launch Windows/File Explorer, right-click your drive, then choose Format followed by FAT32 from the 'File system' menu. Now click Start.

USB stick is write-protected

If you can't write to your USB stick, look for a physical switch – some devices have tiny toggles that you can flip with a thumbnail or pen tip. If not, a Registry key may have become stuck with the wrong value. Back up your PC, then press Win+R, type regedit and press Enter. Navigate to **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\StorageDevicePolicies** and look for or create a key called StorageDevicePolicies. In the right-hand pane look for or create a new 'DWORD (32-bit) Value' and call it WriteProtect. If you do need to create a key or value, right-click in the relevant pane, point to New then choose the relevant option. Double-click WriteProtect and set its value to '0'.



Change this Registry key to remove write-protection, allowing you to copy files

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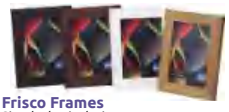

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3	plusnet	Plusnet: Broadband & Calls	£9.99 (£2.50 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps months	∞ unlimited	£30.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin: Broadband & Calls	£17.50 (£4.99 for 9 months)	18 months	50Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£97.41

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Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit A measure of how much information a computer can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels

64bit A technology that processes information in larger chunks. Most modern computers are 64bit.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks that allows for much higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Essential software built into a PC that connects the vital components.

Bootable A USB stick or DVD with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

Burn-in Damage to a computer or television screen which occurs when a very bright image has been displayed for too long.

Cache A temporary space for storing information. Can be memory used on a computer processor, or space on a hard drive used by a web browser.

CF card CompactFlash card. A memory card that uses flash memory technology to store data on a very small card.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Definitions A database of known viruses and other malware used by an antivirus program.

DSLR Digital single-lens reflex. A digital camera that uses a moving mirror so its viewfinder looks out through the lens.

Dual core When two processors are combined into a single chip.

Eight-core A standard processor has one core, but most modern processors are dual-, quad- or eight-core, making them faster.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows. Named after the file extension .exe.

Exposure The amount of light collected by a digital camera's sensor.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Factory settings The original system state of an electronic device.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

Firmware Basic software stored on a device, such as a music player, to control its operation. Can sometimes be upgraded in a process often called flashing.

Flash memory A type of memory that can retain information without a power source. Used in memory cards, and USB sticks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HEVC High Efficiency Video Coding. The successor to Advanced Video Coding (AVC). It offers the same level of picture quality as AVC, but with better compression, so there's less data to deal with.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hybrid hard drive A mass storage device that contains both a conventional hard drive and a flash memory module.

IP address Internet Protocol Address. A unique set of numbers, separated by full stops, used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

LCD Liquid-Crystal Display. The technology used to create almost all flat displays from digital watches to televisions.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image. A one-megapixel image is made up of a million dots (pixels).

MicroSD A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

Micro USB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mirror To wirelessly output what's on your PC to your TV screen.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Optical image stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for any shaking or vibrations that occur during shooting.

PCI Express A faster version of PCI, used by modern graphics cards.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other programs, and is loaded only when it's needed.

Processor The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded. Examples include unnecessary plug-ins, toolbars and browser hijackers.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RA Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it, without compression or optimisation, but which is not compatible with all image editors.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image.

Root control The ability to perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Server A computer on a network, such as the internet, that distributes data to other PCs.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

Trojan A malicious computer program that's disguised as a different, harmless program.

TV tuner card An expansion card that, when fitted into a PC, receives TV signals.

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

VGA Video Graphics Array. A standard socket for connecting a monitor to a computer.

Virtual desktop A desktop environment that you can expand beyond the physical confines of your PC's screen.

Virtual computer A tool that enables you to run a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC, such as running a version of XP in a Windows 7 computer.

WAV file An audio file, used for recording music and other sounds to a CD. Because they are uncompressed, WAV files can be very large.

Wiki site A collaborative website that users can easily edit.

ZIP file A file that can contain a number of compressed documents or files.

Bust more jargon on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/14981

The Final Straw

STUART ANDREWS is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews intensely dislikes. . .

Pointless 'likes'

I've never been a big fan of Facebook's Like button. Some among my friends and family suggest that this is because I'm not particularly amiable or even that I'm downright misanthropic, but I'm inclined to think it goes deeper. It seems to me that people 'like' Facebook posts because they have some sort of vague good feeling about a post but don't really have anything to say. They might agree with an opinion aired, but they themselves don't have anything to add.

> "'Liking' things is just showing others you've looked at their posts, so they might look at yours"

I even suspect that 'liking' things is just another way of showing that you're looking at other people's posts in the hope that they might look at yours and like them back. I wouldn't dream of suggesting that Facebook is 95 per cent driven by narcissism and a cringe-making desire for self-validation, but if you wrote that in a post I'd certainly like it – though not enough to add a comment. Words? Thoughts? That's a little too much like hard work.

Sadly, everyone else seems to like all those likes. Other social networks, such as Google+ and Instagram, liked the like enough to appropriate it. When Apple integrated Facebook into iOS and OS X, it allowed you to like apps too. I sometimes use a web-based office app called Quip, which allows you to like people's work while they're writing or editing a document. I've even heard that Microsoft is going to introduce likes for Outlook on the web, so people can approve of each other's emails.

All this liking fills me with horror. Sure, I can see the Outlook thing going down well in the kind of feelgood, upbeat corporations where people like to congratulate each other on a particularly striking message. But forget about someone liking your email. Isn't it more important they read it, and send a reply if one is required?

Just imagine what would happen if we started liking things in real-world conversations. You're down the pub with some friends, and every time your boozed-up buddy said something you agreed with, or that made you feel vaguely positive, you said "I like that you said that" or "I liked that snarky put-down" or "I like that you asked if I'd like another pint". Trust me, you'd never go out with them again. So why is it so different online? Why do we allow all this lazy, thought-free empathising to flourish?

And flourishing it is. I've just learnt that Facebook plans to augment its likes with 'reactions', which you'll be able to summon up by holding down the like button. These reactions are pointless animated emoticons (there they are – at the bottom of this page in case you were wondering), revealing to the world that you greeted a post with happiness, love, laughter, anger or – sob! – big, wet tears.

Can you imagine how this will play out? Friend lost their job? Their pet? Their partner? There's no need to find something thoughtful to say, just click the yellow face with the big rolling tear.

Does something make you angry? Are you really, really cross about speed bumps on your street or teenagers addicted to selfies? Why articulate your anger in the traditional medium of BIG CAPITAL LETTERS when you can simply press the frowny face instead? Has a friend finished the *Times* crossword? Won a fiver on the Lottery? Swum the channel? No problem. That smug grin with the flushed cheeks says it all.

I hope I'm wrong and that people might still use actual words to express their feelings. I'm not hopeful though. Social media continues to make us dumber, lazier and – in a weird sort of way – less social. And now I'm at it too. I'm going to ditch this column and replace it with one big thumbs-up icon, followed by that big red frowny face.

Do you 'like' what Stuart said? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue Stuart wants to come clean about his filthy keyboards

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